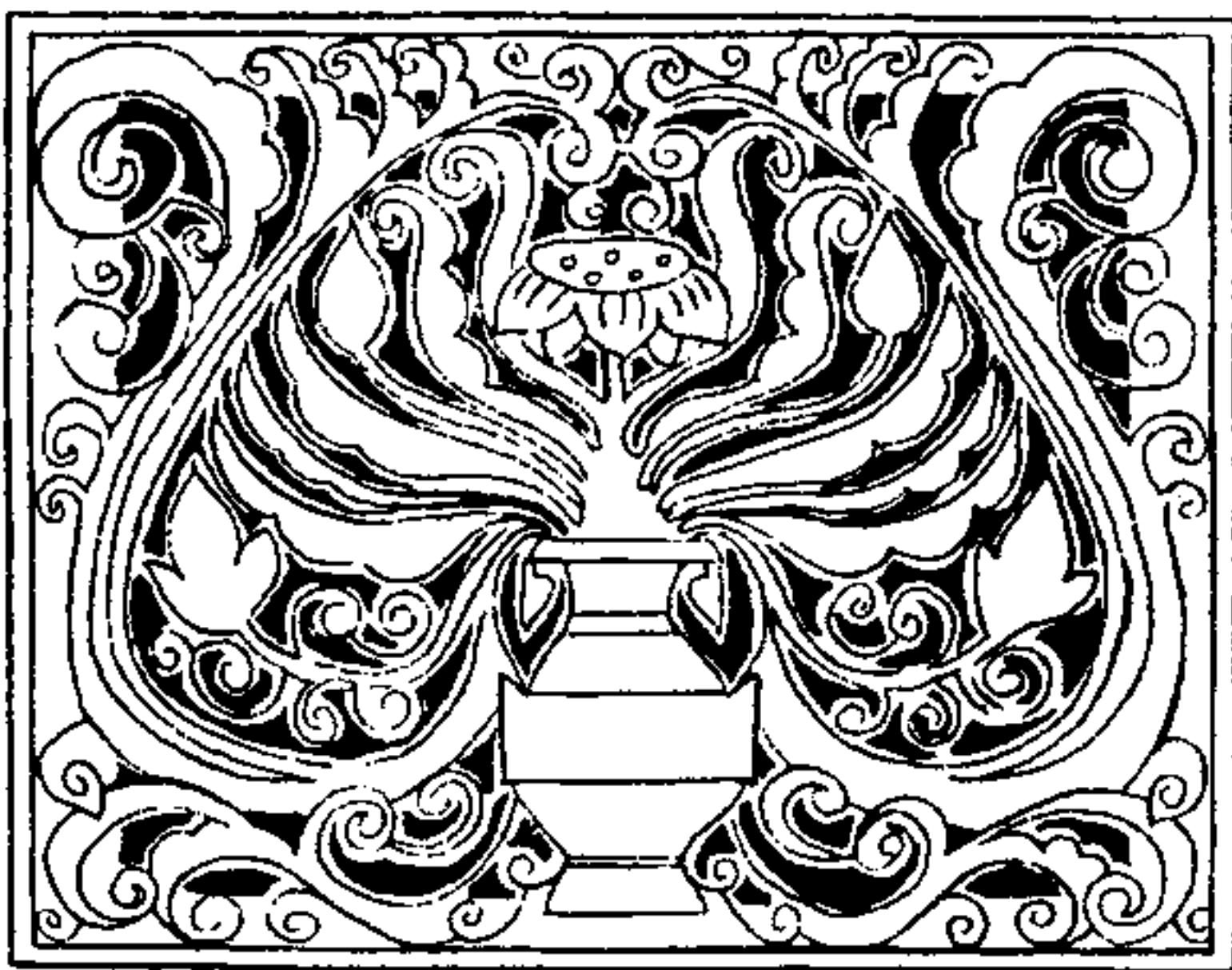




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उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED

Vol. 104

NOVEMBER 1999

No. 11

VEDIC PRAYERS

भास्वती नेत्री सूनृतानाम-
चेति चित्रा वि दुरो न आवः।
प्राप्या जगद्व्यु नो रायो अख्य-
दुषा अजीगर्भुवनानि विश्वा॥
—Rg Veda, 1.113.4

जिह्वाशये चरितवे मघोन्या-
भोगाय इष्टये राय उ त्वं।
दध्रं पश्यभ्य उर्विया विचक्ष
उषा अजीगर्भुवनानि विश्वा॥
—Rg Veda, 1.113.5

क्षत्राय त्वं श्रवसे त्वं महीया
इष्टये त्वमर्थमिव त्वमित्यै।
विसदृशा जीविताभिप्रचक्ष
उषा अजीगर्भुवनानि विश्वा॥
—Rg Veda, 1.113.6

एषा दिवो दुहिता प्रत्यदर्शि
व्युच्छन्ती युवतिः श्रुकवासाः।
विश्वस्येशाना पार्थिवस्य वस्व
उषो अद्येह सुभगे व्युच्छ॥
—Rg Veda, 1.113.7

We know Uṣā as the splendidly brilliant giver of speech (as with her advent, all beings awaken to act and to speak). She is all-knowing (*citrā*) and has opened the doors for us to escape from darkness. She has given us eyesight to see. She has bestowed wealth on us. She has enlightened the whole world.

Living beings were asleep with their bodies bent variously. Uṣā awakened them so that they may engage themselves in their respective occupations. Some go for material enjoyments, some for performing sacrifices, some others for wealth. Beings with vision problems owing to darkness are cured by Uṣā, who destroys darkness and enlightens the whole world.

Uṣā awakens some to seek wealth, some to seek food, some to perform great sacrifices, still others to fulfil their desires. She enlightens the whole world so that living beings may engage themselves in activities pertaining to livelihood.

Sky's daughter (as she destroys its darkness, too) has become visible to all living beings. She is young, wears dazzling and snowy white apparel (as she is brilliance itself). She is the overlord of all the wealth of this world. O dear Uṣā of all such qualities! O dazzling Goddess! Come to us here today and destroy the darkness in and around us.

Genetics and Sri Ramakrishna

EDITORIAL

'Change your *Gītā* verse,' molecular biologists seem to say. Until now we could say that the tree of life had its roots above and branches below (cf. *Gītā*, 15.1). But scientists can henceforth say, 'The roots are with us now! We control life!'

The world will change. Nature will change. Our lifestyle will change. Our language will change. The new millennium is only days away, and it appears as if it is not to be a mere change in calendar but something more. Seeing a field full of plants in full bloom, we may say, 'Oh! What a wonderful factory this one!' Seeing an orchard, we shall wonder, 'I never knew there was an industry here.' Seeing a lamb, we could declare, 'This is indeed a technological masterpiece.'

Scientists claim that it is Genesis No. 2. While the first Genesis was not for money, the present one is purely for money. Man-made nature will welcome the children of the future, who, too, are of course chosen—that is, a child has to be born with the consent of genetic doctors. Not only that: he has to live under genetic supervision, seek jobs under genetic supervision, and die under genetic supervision. We are entering a wonderful world very soon.

The Gene Civilization

We had industrial revolution, technological revolution, transport revolution, computer revolution; and we now have gene revolution. It was thought that all those earlier revolutions would change life patterns drastically. They did, but not so much as to remove all suffering. The gene revolution is being flaunted as one that is set to revolutionize everything. So it is necessary to know something about it.

Life originates with a single cell. This cell consists of a nucleus. The nucleus consists of

chromosomes. Human beings, for instance, have 46 chromosomes. Inside these chromosomes is the hereditary material, called gene. The basic constituent of the gene is the DNA (dioxynucleic acid) in which information is encoded in a chemical language—information about the future, present and past of the organism, and more. In order to make an organism, when a single cell becomes two, then four, then sixteen, and so forth, half of the chromosomes in the parent gene goes to the daughter cell and becomes complete there. This mutation goes on and on, and cells grow in number, some becoming bone cells, some flesh cells, some skin cells, etc. It is the gene information that directs everything and therefore all development takes place. Thus, plants yield fruits and nuts, trees grow tall, leaves are green, we are either dark or fair and tall or short, sheep have wool—all owing to the genes. The environment also plays a role. It is a long history how we came to know about this wonderful gene.

The Work of Gregor Mendel

It was 1866. In a remote place in Austria, in an Augustinian cloister, a senior Bavarian monk discovered something which was to have long-standing repercussions. Gregor Mendel (1822-1884), though not the first, was a systematic student of natural science. Using peas, he suggested a hitherto unknown truth: that heredity is not carried by some fluid like blood, as it was believed for ages, but by the cell. He proposed two important laws: the Law of Segregation and that of Independent Assortment. His two fundamental conclusions—of factorial inheritance and quantitative investigation (which means that each parent which had two factors [or genes] donated one factor each to the offspring, and these two factors combined but retained their

originality for generations) are of much importance today.

Gregor Mendel might be called the father of genetics now, but for almost forty years after his discovery his ideas were ignored. It was when the 20th century dawned that he was rediscovered. Later, in 1909, the physical component of heredity was named 'gene' by Wilhelm Johannsen. William Bateson coined the term 'genetics'.

The Importance of Genetics

The basic interest about genes is as to what information it contains, and how it can be manipulated for our purposes. Not until recently was it possible to map or decode genetic information correctly all that easily. Computers changed the situation radically. Today, molecular biologists the world over, including India, are eagerly making a beeline for information from genes of various species. The competition to gather genetic information is so great that corporate giants are funding various projects which involve searching for plants and animals that are getting extinct, and mapping their codes. Costly patents are being sought for such information. It is said that huge companies which used to mint millions of dollars in the manufacture of chemicals, fertilizers, medicines, etc—like the Monsanto Corporation, Du Pont, and so on in the USA—are closing down their business or selling them away. Instead, they are pouring billions of dollars on biotechnology, the science of genes. So it is not a nine days' wonder at all! The speed with which genes are being uncoded, too, is astounding. With the help of the American government's financing, a project involving \$3 billion is expected to be completed by 2002. This project is the mapping of the entire human genome (genetic material).

What will scientists do by knowing what information the gene contains? This is where genetic engineering comes into the picture. Suppose there is a plant which grows in some particular way. Scientists read the information its genes contain. After that, they will do some tinkering, 'gene-splicing' as the tech-

nique is called, eliminate unwanted material, and add what information they want using other species. By this technique, they can grow whatever they want, and in whatever fashion they want, claim scientists. This genetic engineering is what promises billions of dollars and so, since 1997, big business establishments are running the rat race.

Genetic engineering—the tinkering of genes—is the ultimate tool, claim scientists, which will extend the human being's reach over nature's forces. Scientists claim to be able to control life itself in future. What all can be accomplished by tinkering genes?

Productivity: Until now we would grow white cotton and dye it in factories. Now, genetic engineering is about to eliminate the dye industry by naturally growing coloured cotton. Silk can be grown in bacteria. Weeds of today can become productive plants tomorrow. Animals too are no exception. Cloned animals can become factories manufacturing medicines, vaccines, and so on in abundance. In future, manure and fertilizers will be discarded as plants will be tutored to draw nitrogen from air. Hereafter, children need not be afraid of the needle; they can eat a plantain and thereby get vaccinated. A variety of new seeds, fruits, and vegetables too are in the offing.

Prevention: We are all tired of our bad health. Hardly any human being or animal or plant is free from health problems. In this chemical age, plants are easily susceptible to various diseases. The gene world has opened new vistas in this field also. A new set of micro-organisms will be released soon to kill harmful viruses, and plants themselves will be equipped with disease-resistant strength. In human beings also, it is hoped that tinkering some particular genes can remove the possibility of several hereditary diseases. Scientists can read years beforehand what is in store for a particular individual and change his fate with the help of genetic engineering. This is only the front edge. There are many, many more things in store for the future gen-

erations. Newer ways of manufacturing proteins are being discovered; newer sources are being tapped. All these will enhance human strength to combat diseases, it is hoped.

Cure: Not a few incurable diseases can be cured genetically, they say. Scientists are jubilant over advances in the methods of cure they have discovered. A number of genetically altered or cloned animals are being used as factories to manufacture medicines. These live factories will replace the cumbersome industries of today, scientists hope. Genetic engineering, thus, is all set to change the world radically.

The external nature will change, all right. We may eat new food, see new things, use new medicines, breathe new air—all owing to genetics. But can all our problems be solved by genetics? What about our internal problems like anxiety, fear, suffering, misery, unhappiness and so on? What about meaninglessness and other psychological problems? Can they be solved through such developments? Material development is certainly necessary, but is only horizontal; and horizontal development, however thrilling, is only horizontal development. In spite of our efforts we cannot cross certain limits through material development. We need something else. That is where we come to Ramakrishna.

Ramakrishna for the Future

While Gregor Mendel was finalizing his ideas about genes in Austria, in a corner in India, that very year (1866), Ramakrishna was experiencing the highest spiritual experience ever possible for an individual. He was in the supreme state of *nirvikalpa samādhi* for as long as six months! Later, he also undertook Islamic sadhana that same year. After all his spiritual sadhana, Ramakrishna declared two important and fundamental discoveries: we shall call them the principle of inherent divinity and the principle of the complementarity of religions. He also gave two fundamental teachings: God-realization is the only goal of life, and renunciation and service to God in the human being are ways to attain it.

How will Ramakrishna's ideas help future generations? The first point is, just as the importance of the gene was established by Mendel, the importance of the Spirit (Atman) was established by Ramakrishna. He said that to think of the body as Atman is ignorance (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 582). Everything should centre around Spirit, and only thus shall we attain lasting, eternal happiness, he declared. Just as we studied the contributions of genetics to the future world under three heads, viz productivity, prevention and cure, we can also study Ramakrishna's teachings.

Productivity: We mentioned Ramakrishna's principle of inherent divinity and his teaching about serving God in the human being. Now, did we have the idea that the ideal of serving God in fellow beings would bring about a sea change in us before Ramakrishna's advent? Before Ramakrishna, were there hundreds of institutions aiming at serving people with this noble idea? How many had ever wondered that God can be worshipped in human beings just as we do the image? How many ever understood that by worshipping the human god, we can attain the Supreme? Ramakrishna may not be the foremost in placing this ideal before the world; but his uniqueness lies in the fact that he put everything to test, found them true, and then told the world about them. Thus, though the teaching might have been there elsewhere, it is the power behind that really matters. More importantly, the experiments of Ramakrishna in the spiritual world were all demonstrable experiments—they could be tried by anyone and verified. Such is the uniqueness of Ramakrishna's teaching. Thus, following one of the important laws of spiritual life which Ramakrishna gave to the world, that the human being is God himself and to serve Him in the individual leads to supreme good, hundreds of people are leading inspiring spiritual lives today. Doctors, engineers, scholars, and a host of others are devoting much of their time for the welfare of

others. Such service is not only productive for the one who serves and the one who is served; the society at large will also be benefited immensely. The effects of this will be seen in future more and more clearly. Our meanness will go, we become more and more selfless, we expand, and thus society too develops along healthy lines. When we see God in others, hatred, violence, fear, and such other tendencies will go, and a pure society based on love will result.

Prevention: Of the principles of Ramakrishna we mentioned, one was the principle of religious complementarity. When we read history we see blood spilled everywhere, in the name of religion. Though religion has nothing to do with all this, the weak-minded fanatics misapprehended religion and quarrelled over the superiority of their own religion against those of others. Of all the diseases of society, religious intolerance is the worst. That very religion which should bring peace and lasting happiness should not cause bloodshed. Ramakrishna practised all religions and declared that all religions are complementary to one another and lead to the same goal. Today, Ramakrishna's ideal has been by and large accepted: those who fight in the name of religion are dubbed as fundamentalists. Even the common man on the street knows today that to be a fundamentalist is counterproductive; to hate in the name of religion is bad. As days pass by, this ideal will become more and more popular and clear, thereby preventing the worst kind of disasters humanity is prone to.

Cure: Geneticists have deployed several means to develop newer medicines to cure existing ailments. Ramakrishna has prescribed only one medicine which will cure most of our maladies; and that is renunciation. Renunciation was the song of his life. When the vulture has something in its mouth, it cannot fly freely as crows follow it. Once the

thing is dropped, the crows go after it and the vulture is safe. The simple meaning of renunciation is to minimize our wants. The lesser our wants, the happier we are. The more our ambitions, the more restless we become. Renunciation, therefore, is a practical ideal and not meant for monastics alone. We should all give up desires if we want to live peacefully. Desire alone goads us to evil; once we renounce, we shall be happy. This, then, was the cure Ramakrishna brought about.

Message to a Busy World

One last thing about genetics and Ramakrishna. In order to save much of our time, we have invented several machines, but we ourselves have become robots now. We cannot spare time. We are restless. We are machines. We have no patience to pronounce the word as 'information' and so shorten it to 'info'. We cannot say 'compact disc' and so make it 'CD'. We cannot read long articles: it is better if the article is only of a few lines. For us, everything should be done instantly: we have instant coffee, instant soups, instant washing machines and so on. In such a situation, what has genetics contributed towards enhancing the speed of life? Yes, genetic engineering has made it possible to grow plants and animals far ahead of the usually stipulated period. You need not wait for an animal to be born and to develop for the usual period of time in future; it can happen weeks ahead of schedule.

What did Ramakrishna do for such a world of hurry? He said that God-realization is the *only* goal of life, and that we can attain God in just three days. Something more: 'It is said that, in the Kaliyuga, if a man can weep for God one day and one night, he sees Him,' he declared (*Gospel*, p. 241). Religion has been made simple by Ramakrishna. Thus, Ramakrishna and genetics will naturally be the heart of the future world. □

IMAGES OF INDIA'S PAST

The Lioness

Reports came. Mewar had been surrounded by Ghori's army led by General Qutbuddin. Rajputs were greatly disturbed. Their dear king had passed away and his first wife had committed *sati*. The second queen, Karmadevi, soft and innocent as she seemed to be, ruled them. The Rajput general asked the queen: 'What are we going to do now, Mother?' The queen replied, 'Why? We shall fight the enemy. Are Rajputs afraid of anything?' 'That isn't the problem, Mother,' replied the general sadly. 'The king is no more and...and...you are young. We have none to lead us in battle.' The queen stood up. 'Get ready for war, dear General. I shall lead the army.' The general thought, 'Can this tender lady lead us in war?' But soon bugles roared, drums were sounded, and there was great excitement; and there, Queen Karmadevi, riding on a horse, led the Rajputs from the front. She was a lioness now, with sword in one hand and reins in the other, plundering Qutbuddin's army with lightning speed. Everyone was amazed at her terrific speed. Even the best soldiers were astonished at the swiftness of her sword. The queen put innumerable enemy soldiers to death. Ghori's army could not withstand the fierce onslaught and was easily routed. Mewar had won!

About Bengali Village Houses

E.B. Havell wrote in his *A Study of Indo-Aryan Civilization* (pp. 21-2) over a century ago: 'It is necessary to explain that the peculiar double curvature given to these Bengali roofs and the drawing-out of the eaves at the four corners of the cottage are not mere freaks of the unpractical Oriental builder but thoroughly scientific inventions designed for throwing off heavy rain....The progressive European, rather than learn anything from the Hindu builder, endures patiently the leaky roofs.... It would be interesting to know how much is spent annually...in repairing roofs of official [European] buildings "designed" after the regulation departmental patterns which the Bengali builder has to copy!'

A Tyrant's Story

Sultan Balban! The last sultan of the Slave Dynasty! Elphinstone observes that Balban had no regard for human life and no scruples about shedding blood. He was, to say the least, a ruthless king. He never laughed. His justice, executed without respect to persons, was inhuman and bloody. A small example of his style: 'By royal command many of the "rebels" were cast under the feet of elephants, and the fierce Turks cut the bodies of the Hindus in two. About a hundred met their death at the hands of the flayers, being skinned from head to foot; their skins were all stuffed with straw, and hung over every gate of the city. Delhi remembered no punishment like this, nor had one ever heard such a tale of horror' (Smith, *The Oxford History of India*, pp. 227-8).

Guru Nanak: A Revolutionary Reformer

JASBIR KAUR AHUJA

To commemorate Guru Nanak's birth anniversary, which falls on 23 November 1999, Ms Ahuja from Patiala presents a beautiful review of his advent and significance.

Bhai Gurdas, a great Gurbani scholar, gives an account of Sri Guru Nanak's mission and work. He says, 'When Guru Nanak appeared, the darkness of ignorance was dispelled and the light of knowledge shone forth all over the world. It was like when the sun rises, stars run into hiding and darkness disappears; like when at the lion's roar a herd of deer immediately takes to flight in panic. Places of worship were established wherever Baba Nanak set foot. All the Siddha centres in the world became centres of Guru Nanak's teachings. In every home a *dharmaśālā* was established, and *kīrtan* was sung in joy. Baba Nanak conferred salvation in all directions. Truth prevailed everywhere on earth.'¹

The advent of great souls is to bring peace and spiritual well-being. They provide relief to suffering humanity by uplifting the pious and subduing the wicked. We see this phenomenon taking place with the birth of all great ones: Rama, Krishna, Ramakrishna and many others. These unique personalities come at diverse periods in history so as to fulfil the needs of the times. It is due to their advent that humankind is relieved of its untold suffering and misery.

The benevolent Lord sent Guru Nanak five centuries ago, hearing human cries for help. It is said that Guru Nanak saw in his meditation that the whole world was burning, and so he assumed a human form out of compassion. Guru Nanak was born in 1469 CE. There are two versions about the date but the one on a full moon in the month of Kārtik

(October-November) is considered authentic. The village was Talwandi, now Nanakana Sahib after his name, in Sheikupura district near Lahore. His parents were Kalyanchand Bedi (affectionately called Kalu) and Tripta Devi. It is said that when he was born, 'light flashed across the mud-room in which the birth took place. The gifted and the wise in the celestial regions and below rejoiced at the fortunate event and stood in obeisance to the superb spirit which had adopted bodily vesture in fulfilment of the divine will.' Nanak had a sister by name Nanaki, who played an important role in his life.

A very sweet child, spreading infectious joy everywhere he went, Nanak was sent to a teacher at seven. But he had no interest in bookish knowledge. At such a tender age, he showed signs of otherworldliness and desired only to know divine truths instead of mundane ones. His parents tried their utmost to involve him in worldly activities, but in vain. He had come with a purpose; he had a mission in life. How could the chains of the world bind a bird of heaven which soars high in the sky? Not that Nanak did not study: he mastered all that he was taught with remarkable ease, which astonished his teachers. Not that Nanak did not work: he helped his parents, but when worldly demands were more, nature itself would come in their way of disturbing the boy.

After a lot of persuasion and Nanaki's loving entreaties, Nanak agreed to go to her husband's place, Sultanpur. His brother-in-law, Jairam, arranged for a job as storekeeper in Nawab Daulat Khan Lodhi's shopping centre (*modikhānā*) there. Nanak's mind, how-

1. Prose rendering from Varran Bhai Gurdasji (Amritsar: SGPC, 1964), Var. 1, stanza 27.

ever, was ever immersed in the Divine. How could paltry things attract him? Yet, he worked diligently. His duties were to distribute salaries in kind. Nanak's heart would melt seeing the poor. He would distribute things for free. Whenever he came across the number 13, which is *tera* in local dialect, he would start repeating 'Tera, Tera.' *Tera* also means 'yours'. Everything belonged to the Lord and so who looked after whom? Who would account for whom?

It was at Sultanpur that Guru Nanak's great mission unfolded. He would go away to the Vein river for bath and then retire to the deep jungle for meditation. He would spend hours at a stretch in deep contemplation. It was again at Sultanpur that his future companion, the Muslim minstrel Mardana, joined him. They arranged a group to sing the Lord's praises (*kīrtan*) in the evening.

Once, during his meditation outings, Nanak did not return for three days. Everyone feared he had drowned. But during that period, in deep meditation, he received God's command to go and preach to the world the true religion. The Lord commanded His child to go and rejoice in His name and spread the joy of His name everywhere. The first words Guru Nanak uttered on reappearance were, 'There is neither a Hindu nor a Mussalman.'

His job could no longer hold him. Though married due to sheer insistence of Nanaki and others, Nanak could not be tied down. He was worried about the darkness all around; the misery of the suffering masses prevailed upon his mind. He quit the job. Bhai Bala, a Hindu and Bhai Mardana, a Muslim—both became his constant companions. Henceforth, he made a series of tours known as *udāsīs* to reform people, to preach the glory of God's name, and to bring peace on earth. These tours were spread over a period of about 25 long years, between 1496 to 1521 CE. He went in all directions. At the end of each tour, he returned to Punjab. First of all he went to his follower Bhai Lalo in Aminabad. Bhai Lalo was a carpenter. Nanak revealed

the agony of his heart to Lalo. It was here that Nanak recited the famous hymn:

As the word of the Lord comes to me,
so do I reveal it to you, O Lalo!
Babar has rushed down on India
with his wedding party of Sin,
And forcibly makes demands
from the people of India, O Lalo!
Modesty and righteousness have
vanished,
falsehood is strutting about in glory.
The Kazis and Brahmins have been set
aside,
and devils [ie, Babar's soldiers]
are solemnizing marriages.
The Muslim women read the Koran
in affliction, and call on *Khudā*.
The high-caste Hindu women and
the low, too, groan in this affliction.
Nanak sings paeans of blood,
by sprinkling blood instead of saffron.
In this city of corpses,
Nanak sings the Lord's praises;
He who made the creation
and engaged it in manifold activities,
watches it by sitting apart.
Just is the Lord, His decisions just,
and true shall be the judgement
pronounced by Him.
Bodies will be cut like shreds of cloth
and India will remember
my prophetic words—
In seventy-eight they come,
in ninety-seven they depart.²

It was a song that came out of the depths of Nanak's heart—full of deep concern for human suffering. It is a hymn, depicting the socio-political scenario then. His prophecy too came true. The dates mentioned in the poem are Samvat dates, 1578 and 1597.³ 'The indiscriminate slaughter made the heart of

2. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*.

3. These dates correspond to 1521 and 1540 CE respectively, which are dates of Babar's invasion and Humayun's dethronement by Sher Shah.

Nanak bleed and he foretold how Humayun would first be vanquished by Sher Shah; this would be a temporary eclipse of the Mughal rule in India,' says a famous writer. Though this was a temporary change, the permanent one was brought about by Nanak's spiritual descendant, *mard-kā-celā*, Guru Gobind Singh.

Guru Nanak could not be a silent witness to all the atrocities of the sultans on their own people as well as on Hindus. When India was in such dire straits, Nanak invoked the supreme One, the Akāl Pūrakh, to set things right. He prayed to the Supreme to account for all the tortures people underwent. He sang, 'O Lord, Thou art the creator of all! If a powerful enemy molests an equally powerful one, there would certainly be no grief or complaint. But when a ferocious tiger falls upon a defenceless herd of deer, then must the Master be called to account.'⁴ His hymns during that period were the 'choicest gems of poetry, to be found in the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*,' and their historical value is unquestioned. 'They may be considered leaves from Mother India's autobiography, written by herself or dictated to her truest son which he recorded in his very life's blood.'⁵ Guru Nanak, however, understood that the Lord does everything according to a divine law. Everyone has to reap what he or she sows. His mission, therefore, was to teach God's glory to the world.

Nanak's *udāsis* led him to distant lands. He visited Kurukshetra, Hardwar, Banaras, Assam, Patna, Puri, etc during his first *udāsi*; South India, Sri Lanka, etc during the second; North India, Kangra, Kulu, Chamba, Kailas, etc during his third; and Mecca, Medina, etc during his fourth tour. Wherever he went, he met various religious people, practising various sorts of disciplines. He met Yogis and Siddhas on Mount Kailas, for instance, and defeated them in arguments. He hated none. His compassion overflowed, and he wanted

everyone to come to the right path: so he advised the Siddhas to serve suffering humanity, and to repeat the Lord's name instead of wasting time in seeking supernatural powers. In Mecca, he demonstrated that God is omnipresent and is not confined to any particular holy place. Guru Nanak's final tour was in Punjab itself, disseminating spirituality wherever he went. Finally, he set up a village named Kartarpur on the banks of the river Ravi. He lived there for the last ten years of his glorious life, preaching the practical spiritual gospel of mutual love, service, singing praises of God, keeping oneself clean in body and mind, feeding everyone irrespective of caste and creed, and so on.

One of the most momentous of Guru Nanak's teachings is this: '*Ek Oṁkār*. God is one. His name is eternal Truth. He is the creator of the universe. He is immortal, unborn, self-existent, and is known to us only by the grace of the guru, the enlightener.' Nanak's religion was founded on monotheism; it did not advocate a multiplicity of gods. He believed in the *sat nām*, the true name of God. He advocated essentials. Nanak did not uphold purposeless pilgrimages—they do not elevate the soul, he said. Nanak did not champion ritualistic worship: he was not for worship of images. He was not for segregation of women. In those days when the purdah system was strongly in vogue, Nanak fearlessly advocated that women are *mokṣadvārīs*, and hence allowed them to join congregational singing. In God's eyes, human beings were one. Could God distinguish between man and woman, high and low, upper caste and lower? Nanak therefore advocated eating together at the *paṅgat* (*laṅgar*, free kitchen), without distinction. He spoke the truth and taught the Truth. 'Truth is the highest of all, but higher still is truthful living,' he would say. To some Siddhas on the Sumeru mountain, Nanak said, 'Truth is the moon while falsehood is the darkness. Falsehood prevails like a moonless night now. Sin has enslaved the world and the bull of dharma,

4. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*.

5. Quoted from *The Spokesman Weekly*, Guru Nanak Number, 1968. [Hereafter *Spokesman*.]

holding the earth, bows in anguish. I have come to the world to search for the Truth.' He fought all limitations. Nanak's work will be best appreciated when we go back to his own days, instead of comparing notes with the present. It may not appear significant today to think of people dining together, singing together, living together. About five centuries ago, when India was in the throes of alien rule, when she was suffering unimaginable atrocities, when she was torn between the distinctions of high and low, when Hindus and Muslims could not see eye to eye—Nanak boldly preached the truth that there is absolutely no distinction between Hindus and Muslims. Though a spiritual leader of humanity, Nanak also took some interest in the political situation of his times—not out of any curiosity or for personal gain, but to alleviate human suffering as far as possible. He never cared for powers—occult, political, spiritual or any other. He just cared for God and his creation, and wept at human distress. Had he cared for powers, he could easily have attained many. He told some Yogis in Batala (Punjab) who wanted to test his might, 'I have nothing to exhibit worthy of you to behold. I can only tell you that the world itself may change, but the Creator is unchangeable.' Through miraculous powers, we may change the world, but not the Maker. He told the *pirs* in Multan, who were enraged at his arrival, that he had come like the river Ganga to the ocean. His universality must have stunned them.

According to Sir Mohammad Iqbal, 'The theology of Nanak was not formal, his sole object was to bring about social and moral reform. Sikhism remained pacific and tolerant until the social tyranny of the Hindus and political friction with Muhammadans transformed it into a militant creed.'⁶ It should be added here that the 'militant creed' was not a

chance change: decades after decades of oppression and suffering had made people take to arms, which was for self-defence and protection of the weak. It was never meant to oppress others. We are celebrating the tercentenary of the creation of the Khalsa, the warrior form of Sikhism. It was a gradual growth from Nanak's devotional path to Guru Gobind Singh's Khalsa. Guru Gobind Singh's Khalsa is the culmination of Guru Nanak's *panth*.

Nanak remained a simple devotee till the end, working in fields to feed his numerous disciples, who attended *saigats* (congregations). When he gave up his body at the age of 70 in September 1539, he had a rich following: Hindus, Muslims and every other denomination had eagerly taken to the new faith of love for God and service to fellow beings. His disciples were called Sikhs (Sanskrit, *śiṣya*). Guru Nanak himself appointed a disciple, Angad, as his successor. 'Into the sun is the ray absorbed, water into water. Like light into light is coalesced, the Atman attains perfection by merging into the Paramatman; Jiva with Siva.'⁷

Revered Swami Ranganathanandaji, the President of the Ramakrishna Order, says: 'Guru Nanak and his movement sought to weld Hindus and Muslims into a powerful nation dedicated to the realization of the spiritual and human values, transcending the prevailing communalism of sects and creeds and castes.'⁸

When asked by Mullahs whether Hindu is superior or Muslim, Nanak replied, 'Both come to grief without good deeds.' He said that both fight each other, not knowing that Ram and Rahim are one.

We have seen how Guru Nanak fought, surmounting difficulties; how he swam

(continued on page 875)

6. Sir Mohammad Iqbal, *The Punjab: Past and Present* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1969), Vol. 3, p.257.

7. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*.

8. Swami Ranganathanandaji, *Eternal Values for a Changing Society* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1985), p. 99.

Remembering Sri Ramakrishna

PROF SIDDHESHWAR PRASAD

We thank His Excellency Dr Siddheshwar Prasad, Governor of Tripura, for sending us this article, which is the text of his talk given at the Ramakrishna Mission, Agartala, recently.

To remember Sri Ramakrishna is to dive deep into God-consciousness. We see God through and through in his remarkable life. Mahatma Gandhi said that Sri-Ramakrishna's life was a living example of God intoxication. An iconoclast and agnostic like Narendra was transformed into a spiritual luminary by his very touch. Narendra had contacted not a few great people of those days to know whether they had seen God. He found answer to his question in only one person, Sri Ramakrishna, who not only said he had seen God but also showed Him to Narendra, and trained and infused strength to the latter to preach the gospel of spirituality to the whole world.

As you all know, the President of India conferred upon the Ramakrishna Mission the most prestigious Gandhi Peace Award recently. Swami Ranganathanandaji received it on behalf of the Mission. It is the first time that an organization, instead of a personality, has received the award. There have been many institutions in India and many great souls, but the Ramakrishna Mission is of that rare type, which, since its very inception, has been growing from strength to strength in the service of the world. The reason for this is the name of Sri Ramakrishna and the personality of its founder, Swami Vivekananda, behind it, as also the right attitude of service of God in the human being. The Mission's principle has been to rise above all distinctions and strive for the evolution of the Advaitic ideal in each individual.

India has seen such extraordinary personalities like Raja Rammohan Roy and Swami Dayananda Saraswati. But they could

not reach the nucleus of affliction of the modern world. Sri Ramakrishna was the only personality who understood the malady of modern times perfectly well. Having practised almost all faiths—Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, Śākta, Christian, Buddhist, Islamic and so on—he declared that differences are only at the level of superficial customs alone but the fundamentals are the same. Great men like Rabin-dranath Tagore, Lokmanya Bala Gangadhar Tilak, Sri Aurobindo, and Mahatma Gandhi accepted this teaching with all veneration and were inspired by Swami Vivekananda's ideal of service to humanity.

Sri Ramakrishna was not like those saints and siddhas who would be satisfied with their own salvation, forgetting the millions around. He had been to Kashi and Vrindaban on pilgrimage once. Mathur Babu, the son-in-law of Rani Rasmani, was with him. On the way, seeing the pathetic condition of the poor of Deoghar, he wanted arrangements to be made for their clothing, food and so on. Until all items were brought from Calcutta and distributed amongst the poor, the party did not proceed further.

In order to realize the ideal of service to God in human beings which Swami Vivekananda inherited from Sri Ramakrishna, the former founded the Ramakrishna Mission after his master's passing. The little funds that the monks had collected after the master's passing was spent on the diseased of Calcutta. If other monasteries too had a similar ideal in them, the nation's history would have been altogether different.

The Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893 had been called with the intention of

proving that Christianity was superior to all other religions, and to make roads clear for its propagation and spreading all over the globe. At this very parliament, the interpretation of religion which Swamiji gave based on Vedanta brought to an end all the evil propaganda made against Hinduism around the world. Addressing those who were busy trumpeting the greatness of their own faith, Swamiji said that each frog thinks its own well is the largest since it sees the ocean in it.

What is the fundamental tenet of Vedanta? Everything in this world is God, and God is present in everything. The first mantra of *Īśāvāsyā Upaniṣad* gives this basic principle succinctly: '*Īśāvāsyamidam sarvaṁ yat-kiñca jagatyām jagat*—Everything that is in this universe is enveloped by Īśvara.' In this basic mantra (*mūla mantra*) of Vedanta is present the Advaitic teaching as well as the ideal of 'Self of all' (*sarvātma bhāva*). The Advaita attitude is *sāṅkhya yoga* while the ideal of 'Self of all' is *bhakti yoga*. The structure of the Ramakrishna Mission which Swami Vivekananda envisioned and set in motion was a unique combination of *jñāna-karma-bhakti-dhyāna yogas* and modern science. That is why the Mission's activities go on progressing well.

The Lord permeates every atom of creation. Hiranyakashipu asked his devout son Prahlada whether there was God in the pillar in front of them. When Prahlada said yes, the egotistic demon thrashed the pillar with his mace and out came God as Narasimha.

Sri Ramakrishna used to remain in the state of *bhāva* always. Walking, eating, talking—he would go into samadhi any time, any moment. During the last four or five years of his life, he trained disciples to teach the world the ideals of unity of existence and to serve humanity, looking upon everyone as God. Swami Vivekananda would speak of the harmony of Vedanta and science repeatedly because without expanding, without broadening our view of life, we modern people cannot hope to find lasting solutions to our numerous problems. Science has lessened physical distances all right, but mental distances are

increasing day by day. On the one hand the world boasts scientific and technological progress, while on the other there is an increase in mutual quarrels and fights. Physical comforts have increased enormously but human mind is becoming more and more immoral and diabolic. Two great wars were fought in this century, which killed several millions of people. The atomic bomb explosion over Japan was not done by any Stone Age man but by modern civilized people. The whole world is witnessing an increase in crime and cruelty; terrorism is given a freehand everywhere and human values have gone into hiding.

When we look at the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission from this angle we can understand what a laudable work it has been doing. When communal tension spread like wildfire in Tripura last time, hundreds of lives were sacrificed. Was there any solution to the problem because of that? In a situation of communal frenzy, the Ramakrishna Mission has opened an institution here and has helped everyone live in an atmosphere of mutual love and oneness. It is indeed laudable. Not only in Tripura but elsewhere in North-Eastern parts of India too there is an urgent need of such institutions which, along with higher education, can make broad-minded, large-hearted individuals out of the masses. I have discussed this matter with the Human Resources Development Minister of India, Dr Murli Manohar Joshi; the President of Ramakrishna Mission, Swami Ranganathanandaji; the President of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Sri C. Subramanyam; and other friends.

The twentieth century belonged to Europe: to two great wars, to the atom bomb; the twenty-first century belongs to India: to the unification of Vedanta and Science; to the feeling of love and oneness. It goes without saying that during the next century and the coming millennium the role of the Ramakrishna Mission in the world will be vital.

How will this mission be fulfilled? I have mentioned the attitudes of Advaita and 'Self in all' (*sarvātma bhāva*) in the beginning. Sri

Ramakrishna's life manifested these two ideals fully. Seeing the vast literature of Swami Vivekananda, his brother-disciples, and others, the service given by the Mission during these one hundred years, my conviction is becoming more and more strong day by day that there is no other organization fit for such activities.

If strength lies only in bookish scholarship, why would we have remembered Sri Ramakrishna? If strength lay in power or position, why would kings and big people bow down before Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swamiji? If strength lay only in money, why would not more moneyed organizations become more successful?

The evils of blind materialism that appears to spread its tentacles all around can be overcome only by resorting to Sri Ramakrishna. Why does Advaita alone appear to be an honest and true philosophy? This is because Advaita alone is the ultimate reality; oneness of the Self is the only reality. Why do we think repeatedly of Sri Ramakrishna alone whenever we think of a living example in religion? This is because the personification of religion which people wanted is found in him and we are completely satisfied with him; not only that, all the inspiration we need can be found in him and also our rational mind stops in him.

There have been many gurus and many disciples in this world; but a person like Sri Ramakrishna as guru, and Vivekananda as disciple, can perhaps be found only in the example of Sri Krishna and Arjuna. In order to save humanity, ages ago Nara and Narayana incarnated as Arjuna and Krishna. In this present age, people are convinced that Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna came with the same purpose.

Speaking in ordinary parlance, Sri Ramakrishna was born with absolute faith in God. Perhaps, to use modern terms, his very genes were saturated with faith. The *Gītā* (4.39) says, '*Śraddhāvān labhate jñānam.*' Sri Ramakrishna was not a scholar in the ordi-

nary sense, neither was he a student of scriptures; however, he had reached the very source of all these with absolute ease. In the Indian tradition, just as the glory of faith has been sung, the glory of the guru has also been sung unequivocally. The same faith that Sri Ramakrishna had in Mother Kali was evident in Swamiji towards Sri Ramakrishna. There is no second example of such unique faith. It is this faith alone that gives birth to religion. Does this mean that Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji gave birth to a new religion? Is this the last or the latest religion? In this scientific age where gross physical pleasures rule the world, will humanity have lasting peace and happiness by following the ideals of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda? Is there no need to think deeply over this today? The author of the *Mahābhārata* says, '*Nārāyaṇam namaskṛtya naram caiva narottamam*—Having saluted both Nārāyaṇa and Nara.' In this present age, have not Nārāyaṇa, Sri Ramakrishna, and Nara, Swami Vivekananda, come as guru and disciple to herald a new age, give us a new vision, provide us with a new social awareness?

The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (5.6.1) says that the Puruṣa or supreme Being is of the nature of mind. The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* also says that Brahman is mind. The whole of Indian tradition stresses the vital need of purifying the mind, and gives various means to achieve it. All paths—Vedic, Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, Śākta, Jaina, Bauddha, Sikh—accept the need of mental perfection. Not even a tenth of the depth to which Indian mental sciences have gone has been reached by similar sciences elsewhere. The Indian ideal of strength of mind has been given a new dimension by Ramakrishna-Vivekananda and this is helping us immensely. We should accept this ideal by giving up all inhibitions. The Ramakrishna Mission has been doing yeoman service in removing the poison from the atmosphere of the world. Hence there is need to widen its scope and capacities. □

Vedanta and Human Rights

DR D. NESY

Dr (Mrs) Nesy, Reader, Department of Philosophy, University of Kerala, gives an in-depth account of the relation between human rights and Vedanta.

The concept of human rights is of central importance in the context of the happenings in the modern world. Innocent people have become victims of oppression and discrimination in the present-day world situation. We are confronted with inequality, brutality and violence to an unimaginable extent. The reality of infringement upon human rights in various forms and degrees ranges from torture and ill-treatment of prisoners to the use of deadly chemicals, aerial bombardment of defenceless towns and villages, racism, apartheid and the practice of slavery. The discriminatory treatment of minorities and cultures, and the denial of equal rights to women, are still prevalent. The universal and fundamental freedom talked about is denied. Injustice and discrimination continue to thrive. New forms of these appear with urbanization, technological and economic development. Alienation, increase in modes of communication, growing contamination of the environment and the like threaten the very security of human life. The ideal of self-realization has been hindered from all sides. Certainly, the denial of human rights is responsible for the escalation in violence. In this context, the proclamation of Vedantic truths must be extended to the sphere of human rights also.

What are Human Rights?

An examination of the meaning and implication of human rights is relevant and important here. The problems concerned with rights have steadily attracted the attention of political and legal philosophers, especially since the 17th century. Ancient Greek society was divided into two classes: freemen and slaves, and the latter had no rights. The Mid-

dle Ages witnessed common people as being no better than slaves. The medieval philosophers spoke not of rights but of duties a person owed to his lord or king. A marked change occurred with the introduction of phrases like 'an Englishman's birthright' or 'natural rights', which are more personal and universal. The idea that an individual can have a right which is inalienable and indefeasible, possessing some kind of sanctity and validity, and which transcends the ordinary positive laws, is the basis for the examination of the nature and criteria of human rights.

Ordinarily understood, a right is a claim upheld by law. The concept of rights was originally associated with juridical law. Legal writers like Wesley Hohfeld and Arthur L. Corbin distinguish between claim-rights and mere liberties. A legal right is a claim to performance usually against other private persons. Other people have duties towards the right-holder. The meaning of rights becomes clearer when it is contrasted with liberty or privilege. Liberty is marked by the absence of duty, it is a licence to invade another's right; as for example, consent is a form of privilege. A legal benefit as that of a driver's licence is also a privilege. Rights stand in sharp contrast to liberties. It is something that can be urged, pressed or rightly demanded against other persons. When a right is duly given to a person, there is no reason for gratitude since it is one's own due. It is a value which cannot be replaced by any amount of love, compassion, obedience or obligation.

Positive and Negative Rights

Rights can be positive or negative. A positive right means that something should

be provided for me, and that it is an authorization of the other person's positive actions against me. For example, I may have a right to earn a living or to medical treatment. My positive rights imply that someone else has the duty to do something for me. On the other hand, when I say that I have freedom of speech or the right to practise my religion, what is meant is that I should be left free from interference in these fields. This is a negative right, a right to the other person's omissions. That I have a right means either someone else has the duty to provide the service I claim or to leave me alone. The right not to be interfered with or the right to food, shelter, education, etc certainly admit of exceptions. Hence these cannot be held to be absolute.

Legal rights are different from moral rights. Legal rights are conferred by specific rules and they protect the privileges in a certain situation. They are bound by institutional regulations. That is, they depend on social recognition. But there are rights which are not derived from such clearly visible laws and institutional regulations. Even before there is any regulation or law conferring such a right, we assert that someone has a right to do something. Such rights are termed moral rights which are treated as existing prior to, or independently of, any legal right. Moral rights do not depend on social recognition. They are not even recognized by the person who has them.

Human rights come under moral rights. A definition of human rights may be like this: 'Human rights are generically moral rights of a fundamentally important kind held equally by all human beings unconditionally and unalterably.' Human rights are enjoyed by all human beings by virtue of their belonging to the species of *homo sapiens*. The 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights states: 'Everyone, as a member of society...has the right to work, to free choice of employment...to just and favourable remuneration...to rest and leisure...and periodic holidays with pay...to food, clothing, housing and medical care...to

education...to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.'

Respect for Divine Law

The roots of human rights can be traced to the concept of 'natural rights', according to which there are some rights that all persons possess equally, which are professed to be 'inalienable and inviolable.' In a sketchy analysis of his political philosophy, John Locke includes the rights to life, liberty, and property among natural rights. For him natural law is a claim to innate, indefeasible rights inherent in the individual. He even goes to the extent of saying that the individual and his rights are ultimate principles. This points to the fact that natural rights transcend the State; they are not the creation of the State. At the same time, the State and positive law have to safeguard such rights. These rights form part of an unseen order of the universe seeking expression in concrete terms. Accordingly governments are founded upon respect for and conformity to Divine Law. The major religions of the world testify to this fact—the Shariah of Islam, the Dharma of Hinduism, the Law of Moses of ancient Israel are all examples of this type of universal law prior to the formation of the State. In a similar way most of the modern constitutions are formed prior to the establishment of a government and incorporation of these inalienable and God-given rights.

A number of historical documents such as the Magna Carta, the English Bill of Rights, the US Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, etc also contain provisions for human rights. The French National Assembly recognized ignorance, neglect or contempt of human rights as the sole cause of public misfortune and corruption of government, and hence firmly resolved to set forth these natural, imperceptible but inalienable rights. It proclaimed that the goal of society was the common happiness of its members and that the government was established to guarantee to individuals the enjoyment of

their natural rights such as liberty, equality, security and property.

Freedom and Dignity of Individuals

Several attempts have been made in the history of philosophy to assert the dignity of the individual. Pico della Mirandola in the 15th century spoke vehemently against the medieval spirit which recognized the human being as a creature of lust and wickedness, a mere infinitesimal being in comparison with the majesty of God. He stressed human free-will and the dignity of the human personality. This optimistic concept of the 'dignity of man' representing a faith in the potentialities of human existence was taken up by Immanuel Kant, who portrayed man as an autonomous being having a personality of infinite intrinsic worth. Everything in this world has an exchange value, a price for which the owner is willing to sell his property; but man alone possesses self-direction and dignity, for he is priceless. He has moral will and free choice of action. Stressing the importance of freedom, Kant observes, 'Freedom is independence of the compulsory will of another and insofar as it co-exists with the freedom of all according to a universal law, it is the one sole original inborn right belonging to every man by virtue of his humanity.'¹ According to Kant the real or essential aspect in a person is not accidental or historical but teleological. He says, 'I shall set forth the method by which we must study man—man not only in the varying form in which his accidental circumstances have moulded him, in the distorted form in which philosophers have almost always misconstrued him, but what is enduring in human nature and the proper place of man in creation.'² All these place man even above the angels: 'With all his failings, man is still better than angels void of will.' Accordingly Kant held that man belongs to the 'kingdom of ends' and must be treated as an end in himself

only.

Existentialism proclaims itself to be a doctrine of the individual and for the individual. Human existence and human freedom are the bases upon which all endeavour is built up.

Recognition of the dignity of and respect for the human personality is basic to human rights. All the great religions of the world in one form or other teach reverence for life—in particular, human life: its dignity, value, responsibility, aim and meaning. And in this religious insight also we can trace the roots of human rights. The Judeo-Christian religion finds the dignity of the individual in his creativeness 'in the image of God' as *Genesis* enjoins that God created the individual being in His own image.

God said, 'Let us make man in our own image and our likeness' (*Genesis*, 1.26). This assigns a responsibility to the human being which lies in his special relationship or fellowship with God and with his own fellow-men. Regarding the purpose of human life, it is taken to be an ideal which transcends the mundane goals of human existence and is based on the vision of God or the ultimate Reality.

Scriptural Equality

Religions can provide the basis for human rights in another way also. The sacred scriptures of all faiths proclaim the equality of all persons irrespective of the differences between male, female, rich, poor, race, class, or caste. God is the parent of all humanity and all human beings have descended from the one pair of original ancestors, Adam and Eve. Prophet Malachi, pleading for Judaism, says (*Malachi*, 2.10): 'Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us?' The Koran puts it like this: 'O mankind, we created you from a single pair of male and female and made you into nations and tribes that you might know each other (not that you might despise each other).'³ In religions like Buddhism,

1. Immanuel Kant, *Philosophy of Law*, p. 56.

2. Ernst Cassirer, *Rousseau, Kant and Goethe* (Princeton, 1945), pp. 1-2.

3. The Koran, trans. M. Pickthall, 49.13.

Jainism, Hinduism and Confucianism the essential equality of all is assured from the fact that realization is available to all equally. That is, enlightenment, or unity with the Absolute, or fellowship with the Ultimate, is the sacred duty every man can aspire for. According to the *R̥g Veda*, 'God of glory is He to whom both Aryans and outcastes belong.'⁴ The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* treats the distinctions of man, woman, youth, maiden, etc, as only diverse forms of the one Reality. Distinctions among people are attributed to their conduct, morality, level of spiritual education and attainment, and not to birth. The *Bhagavadgītā* makes it clear thus: 'I look upon all creatures equally, none is less dear to Me and none more. All those who take refuge in Me, whatever their birth, race, sex or caste, will attain the supreme goal. This realization can be attained even by those whom society scorns.'⁵ Here there are no distinctions of class, caste, nationality, race, or sex. Jainism holds that by deeds and not by birth one is a brāhmaṇa, by deeds one is a kṣatriya, by deeds one is a vaiśya, and by deeds is one a śūdra.

The social dimensions of human rights also derive their meaning from religious presuppositions: to participate in social life and fulfil its diverse responsibilities is considered to be an integral part of being human in religions like Confucianism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, etc. These religions teach equality beyond all barriers, affirming the dignity of all members of society.

Unfortunately, certain conventional interpretations of passages from the sacred texts promote discrimination among people on the basis of caste, colour, creed, or sex. There is thus an urgent need for all religions to examine and reconfirm their teachings concerning the dignity, responsibility and equality of humankind. A more refined sense of religious consciousness is to be developed so that we can overcome all forms of discrimina-

tion and regard the human being in the right perspective.

The Vedantic Perspective

With these ideas about human rights, let us turn to Vedanta and examine the place, role and dignity of an individual according to it. Are human rights relevant in the Vedantic context of explaining the nature, duty and purpose of the individual? One can clearly see that certain conceptions of Vedanta regarding the individual and his destiny surely admit of human rights considerations. First and foremost, let us take the Advaitic concept of the human being. The Advaitic thought of Śaṅkara is a systematic presentation and coherent exposition of the Upanishadic themes. Brahman is the central theme of Vedanta. It is real, It is knowledge itself, It is infinite. It belongs to an altogether different order where description and explanation do not count for much. The human being is in his innermost essence Brahman. But this fact is clouded by ignorance. When right knowledge sets in and the cloud lifts, the individual realizes his true nature. The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* says that he who knows Brahman becomes Brahman himself. If the individual were not already Brahman, no amount of knowledge could raise him to Brahmanhood. This knowledge is quite different from ordinary or conceptual knowledge. The knowledge of Brahman is an intuitive experience, a deep communion, a direct realization. The individual becomes seemingly separated from the supreme Self because of ignorance. Knowledge removes this ignorance and thus, when limiting adjuncts are removed, there comes the realization that the human being is indeed the Absolute. Realization of Brahman is the highest human objective.

This highest truth is certainly an example of the recognition of human dignity to the core. Similarly the teaching 'That thou art,' implying the superiority of nothing else to the human being, once again testifies to the dignity and respect of the individual. In fact, the Upanishads contain several passages which

4. *R̥g Veda*, 8.51.9.

5. *Bhagavadgītā*, 9.29, 32, 33.

completely rule out the possibility of any discrimination, since all the essential traits of the human soul are attributed to the common Source. The question of one being superior to another does not arise at all.

Sometimes we argue that the Upanishads admit the metaphysical reality only and therefore at the practical level discrimination and inequality are accepted. Śaṅkara's attitude towards women and their position in society is cited as an example. Women are essentially related to household needs, their mental horizon being restricted to the family, and so the education of a girl-child is limited to domestic affairs only. Furthermore, according to the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, acceptance and obedience are treated as part of womanly nature.

The Status of Women

Now, it has also to be noted that there are several Upanishadic passages which adore women and place her on a par with man. The Upanishadic consideration of society and social relations bear witness to this. According to it, the Self binds the society with bonds of love: the love of Self alone is the basis of becoming dear. Women are treated variously as wife, mother, etc, and in all these they are equal to and sometimes superior to men. For example, as a wife, she is the physical and spiritual companion of man, her presence being essential for the performance of all religious rites, the preservation of the race, and even for happiness. A man has to share his possessions with her. She is competent enough to receive education and become learned and to participate in philosophical discussions. According to the Upanishadic tradition, children are precious and thus women, as responsible for training children in the right manner, are glorified.

Commenting upon the neglect of women by denying them education, status, and opportunities of development, Vivekananda points out that the evil of discrimination represents a negation of the Vedantic doctrine of divinity of all human beings, men

and women alike. For him, women are the emblems of the Divine Mother. Hence he said, 'Why is it that our country is the weakest and the most backward of all countries?—Because Shakti is held in dishonour there.'⁶ He would say that there is no chance for the welfare of India unless the condition of women improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly with one wing only, he added.

A similar attempt to uplift women and provide them equal opportunities can be found in Gandhiji's programmes. He always wanted India's womanhood to realize its due status, work and duty in society. He wanted women to have education, to become efficient partners and to play a vital role in the family.

Social life and responsibilities are other fields to be considered. The Upanishads present a society oriented towards earthly pleasures and riches. References to family lineage (*kula*) and classes (*varṇa*) of people engaged in a common profession can be found in them. Accordingly we find different castes with definite functions, rights and responsibilities. Of these, the most important rights were the right to perform sacrifices and the right to Brahman knowledge. The Upanishads are very particular in reserving the right to sacrifice to brāhmaṇas alone who have the sole right to officiate as priests. As an exception kṣatriyas were also allowed. So is the case with Brahman knowledge.

Accepting the scriptural position, Śaṅkara also reserves the right to the knowledge of Brahman to the upper castes alone who are 'equally qualified to study the Vedas.' Śūdras were debarred from the study of the Vedas and performing sacrifices.

Why Distinctions?

As an exception to this hard and fast rule of denying the right to study the Vedas and performing sacrifices to the śūdra, Śaṅkara admits that all the four castes have the right

6. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), Vol. 7, p. 484.

to acquire the knowledge contained in the Itihāsas. Thus, śūdras could have the knowledge of Brahman through the study of the *Gītā* and such other texts. The *Gītā* itself declares that all people—women, vaiśyas, śūdras and so on—can attain the highest.

Two points have to be mentioned here. First, Brahman is stated to be beyond caste distinctions. Since the Upanishads teach that Brahman is the source of everything, they teach social equality also. The distinction between inferior and superior is therefore unwarranted. Second, Śaṅkara himself admits the necessity of caste, life-stages, and actions only at the unenlightened state of life. That is, the division of castes has been introduced in order to defend the undertaking of rites by people who are under the spell of ignorance. So far as the ignorant are concerned caste and such other distinctions have meaning. When enlightenment dawns, these become meaningless. In one of his commentaries, Śaṅkara writes, 'The different castes such as the brāhmaṇas, kṣatriyas and so on, the various orders of life upon which rites depend, and which consist of actions and their results, are notions superimposed on the Self owing to ignorance. That is, it is all based on false notions....'

Again, two other important concepts emphasized in the Upanishads are significant from the human rights point of view. These are dharma and ahimsa. Dharma is translated as justice. Different Upanishads refer to it differently—as duty, right, virtue, etc. The Upanishads say that we should practise dharma in our lives. Dharma is a very comprehensive term and has a very significant

position in Hindu ethics, referring not only to social, economic, and personal duties but aiming at creating mental, moral, and spiritual fellowship among men. Dharma is created for the well-being of creation. The *Mahābhārata* enjoins that dharma is so called because it protects and preserves all that is created. Dharma is that principle which is capable of preserving the world. In the Indian tradition it is accepted as an arbiter, the individual and social conscience-keeper, and as such it includes all the religious observances, secular laws of society and community and individual rights and duties. Another essential doctrine extolled in the Upanishads is non-violence which is accepted as a duty of everyone. Let us note that the Upanishads despise violence not only towards human beings but towards animals also. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* regards non-violence as a means to the world of Brahman.

All the above facts reveal the relevance of human rights in the Vedantic context. Developed from the scriptural triad (*prasthāna-traya*), Vedanta deals not only with the metaphysical and epistemological problems but also with the social life of the individual, his rights and responsibilities. A true appreciation of the worth of a human being is basically essential for understanding the meaning and importance of human rights. Expressed in different forms and places, this principle is accepted in the Vedanta. What is required is the attempt to justify the effective protection of human dignity and oppose violation of the rights of the human being. This is necessary not only as a basis for lasting peace but also as a foundation for social justice. □

The Clowns

One day, after the meditation session at Camp Irving, USA, Miss Bell remarked, 'This world is an old schoolhouse where we come to learn our lessons.' Swamiji asked, 'Who told you that?' and added, 'Well, I don't think so. I think this world is a circus ring in which we are the clowns tumbling.' Bell asked, 'Why do we tumble, Swami?' And Swamiji replied, 'Because we like to tumble. When we get tired, we will quit.'

Real Stress Management

SWAMI SATYAMAYANANDA

Swami Satyamayananda studies stress from several angles and describes ways of overcoming it. He is in charge of Prabuddha Bharata work in Calcutta.

'Stress, the silent killer', 'Stress: the door to neurosis', 'How to cope with stress'—these are some of the common phrases in society today. Psychological stress is generally interpreted and understood as pressure or interference that disturbs the normal functioning of the organism. This phenomenon is attracting a lot of attention even as its ominous effects are coming to light. Increasing complexity in social trends and volatile cross-currents go to making the situation grim. This is one of the negative effects of our scientific and technological age, which is also responsible for unhappy homes, crime, insanity—to name a few.

To illustrate psychological stress by means of biological stress, we shall look at the workings of the immune system. Every organism is constantly being invaded and attacked by an extensive range of viruses or pathogens. The organism's immune system is likewise constantly alert in battling and destroying these pathogens with its array of white blood cells, macrophages, T cells, and some proteins. When the attack is intense, the response to it is also strong and the heat generated makes us ill and feverish till the pathogens are phagocytosed. The body returns to normality only after that. What it underwent was stress.

In psychological stress the mind is attacked by a swirling mass of sensations and stimulations that constantly and irrepressibly enter through the doors of perception. It understands some, gets confused with a good deal—since it cannot correlate them with past impressions—and ignores many, or does not register those which are non-relevant to the

organism's survival. These sensations are good, bad and all possible shades in between. If the mental defenses based on our past knowledge and karma are healthy and strong, they resist and overcome the disturbing invasion of negative influences. The stronger the pressure, the greater the mind has to struggle till it can bounce back victorious. Until it does that, it is under stress. If stress is more powerful, or the defenses inadequate, the result is anxiety, manic-depression, neuroses, etc. The mind is generally fully equipped to meet them, by filtering out, rejecting, or plainly forgetting. But since things are not so simple as they used to be earlier, the individual's mental and physiological defenses are weak, and he gets overwhelmed and succumbs to these forces.

In working to eliminate stress, psychology and psychiatry try to probe and uncover those repressed causes in an individual's subconscious that influence the conscious, resulting in abnormal behaviour. As knowledge of the mind and that of the organism in general is growing, psycho-somatic science, which was not taken very seriously before, is gaining wide acceptance. Research has shown conclusively that many ailments and diseases that beset us are linked to mental disturbances, anxiety, depression, etc. People who are impatient, who have an unnatural sense of urgency, and who are competitive, succumb quickly to diseases like coronary heart problems, diabetes, etc.

India, from very ancient times, knew this fact. To its metaphysicians and philosophers, mind was not distinct and separate from the body, but was intimately connected with it. In

fact, the mind's gross outer covering was called body. Any disturbance in the one affected the other. This disturbance was attributed to external or internal causes. The *Caraka Samhitā* says:

Dejection is the main cause of the aggravation of diseases; joy is the chief cause of its decrease. Grief is the principal cause of the emaciation of the body, contentment is the chief cause of its development. Depression is the main cause of the body's decay, carrying out resolutions is the main cause of its growth.... Causes such as extreme timidity, perversion, immoral acts, confusion, lust, illicit love, anger, avarice, fear, grief, apprehension, etc unhinge the mind, make intelligence lapse and provoke bodily humours which attack the heart and obstruct the *nādis*, crippling the organism and leading to insanity'

The remedies prescribed say,

A person with controlled senses and mind is not afflicted with diseases. Temperance, dispassion, generosity, impartiality, truthfulness, forgiveness, good speech and actions, purity, clear understanding, true knowledge, penance and meditation are the remedies for all diseases, both physical and mental (J.N. Sinha, *Indian Psychology*).

People have been brought up on a mind-body dichotomy diet, and worse, for dessert, having a reverse way of looking at things. They think that they are bodies and have a mind or psyche. This has led to crass materialism, fear of death, and godless life; and the rift between science and religion is getting wider. In short, they view things from *outside in*. The old way was of thinking and viewing things from *inside out*—that we are basically souls invested with matter, the finer part of it being mind and the grosser, the physical body and the external world of objects. This line of thinking has discovered for us the glory of the unchanging immortal Atman in the midst of ephemeral nature. Occidental philosophy, science, psychology, etc take up external nature and relate it to the ego or to the neutral

processes of the brain, or consciousness, the nature of which is improperly understood. Indian thinkers based their studies on the Atman and tried to relate everything to that. All subjects—sciences, metallurgy, mathematics, medicine, etc—were designed to direct the mind towards the spiritual dimension within. Our philosophy, consisting of psychology and epistemology, always had an ontological basis.

Stress is inevitable in life, and this is true not only for us but also for all living beings—even plants! Swami Vivekananda says in his *Karma Yoga*: 'Life itself is a state of continuous struggle between ourselves and everything outside. Every moment we are fighting actually with external nature....' The body and mind are constantly acting on external objects. The reactions, both positive and negative, goad us to more actions, which again is followed by reactions. Thus we get enmeshed in the karmic chain. To a certain degree stress is necessary to bring out our inner resources, to make our inner qualities grow. There are some people who work better under stress; but if the pressure is long and constant and if the inner resources are inadequate, we suffer. There is no doubt that an individual's success or failure in controlling and overcoming potentially stressful situations has a profound effect on his ability to function properly. A person interacts with different people at different levels—physical, emotional, intellectual—in differing degrees. Correspondingly, there is stress at those levels to that degree.

Our personality and character do not reside in the physical body but in the subtle body (*sūkṣma śarīra*). Hence stress has to be tackled there. The subtle body goes under the generic name mind, made of very fine matter (*tanmātrās*). The subtle body comprises of *citta*, the storehouse of past impressions (*saṁskāras*); *manas*, which deliberates between pros and cons; *buddhi*, the intellect; and *aḥamkāra*, the pervasive feeling of I-ness. Included also are the five *prāṇas* or life forces,

the five sensory organs (*jñānendriyas*), the five motor organs (*karmendriyas*). The past impressions are broadly categorized as *dharma* and *adharma*, and are dormant (*prasupta*), attenuated (*tanu*), overpowered (*vicchinna*), or expanded (*udāra*) in form. The subtle body functions in the states of waking and dream, and withdraws itself in deep sleep. It resides in the gross body and pervades it completely, part of it moving outside at times. It creates the gross body according to its store of past karma and knowledge, discarding it when it becomes worn-out, to take up another. It is insentient but appears sentient due to the Atman's reflection on it; owing to ignorance (*avidyā*) it erroneously thinks that consciousness belongs to it. Vedanta uses the analogy of a red-hot iron ball: this ball has the property to burn, but its burning power is derived from the fire.

A minimum knowledge of our inner nature is indispensable in understanding and controlling stress, without which all remedies will be like water on a duck's back. To eradicate the real causes of stress, scriptures instruct us that stress has first to be made manageable by the performance of good actions. This is a very powerful tool every person is endowed with. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (4.4.5) says, 'As it (self) does and acts, so it becomes; by doing good it becomes good, and by doing evil it becomes evil. It becomes virtuous through good acts and vicious through evil acts.' Selfless action purifies the mind of dross.

The next is meditation. This is vital, as it releases constructive energies from within, controls and calms the body and mind, and takes one into the depths of his or her real being. Meditation preceded by moral disci-

pline quickly brings efforts to fruition. The power of introspection will be instrumental in rectifying bad *saṃskāras* or making them attenuated. A method called biofeedback tries to imitate its primary stages using modern electronic machines. Biofeedback is information supplied instantaneously about an individual's physiological process. Data concerning a person's cardiovascular activity, temperature, brain waves, muscle tension, etc is monitored and fed back to him on a gauge or a screen or by light or sound. The individual is then made to use such data to voluntarily control any particular body-part by using only his will-power, thus establishing control over it. The various *āsanas* are found effective—physical exercises boost self-confidence. Other methods are what behavioural psychology advocates: changing habits, environments, etc. But long untreated cases that become severe need specialized treatment by a psychiatrist to uncover and study the repressed underlying causes.

Vedanta says that all knowledge and power are inherent. Every time we struggle, not only we but all animals and plants—in short, everything endowed with life—are manifesting this knowledge and power from within. Only it is done unconsciously. Vedanta shows how to do so consciously and deliberately, so '...here in this refined machine, when hatred comes to me, I process it, and send out only love and compassion...' (Swami Ranganathananda, 'Approach to Truth in Vedanta' in *Prabuddha Bharata*, April 1999). Then will we never buckle under any kind of stress. Then and then alone will vanish, like morning mist, all pains before the blazing sun of the Atman. □

Whenever you feel you are at a loss, pray to God with heart and soul; he is there within you, the very soul of your soul. He will throw light from within; he will let you know what exactly is to be done.

—Swami Shivananda

The Role of Nonprofit Organizations in Tomorrow's India

SWAMI JITATMANANDA

Author of the famous book, Swami Vivekananda, Prophet and Pathfinder, Swami Jitatmanandaji is well known as an orator, and is an authority on Management etc. Presently head of our Rajkot centre, the Swamiji was editor of Prabuddha Bharata for some time.

India is a multi-religious, multi-lingual, multi-cultural subcontinent, teeming with the energy of rising population of 100 crores. The nonprofit social service organizations work voluntarily with dedication and zeal—both for nation-making and man-making. Many of them are inspired by religious idealism, some by social and national idealism. The primary aim of most of these organizations is socio-economic growth, leading to cultural, moral and ethical elevation of life. The government proposes plans and nonprofit organizations deliver the goods, sometimes with government assistance, sometimes without—just by collecting funds from the public. They are a vital factor in the rise of India today. The ability of the government in achieving social, cultural, economic and spiritual excellence is limited. That is why nonprofit organizations are coming up everywhere.

The activities of voluntary organizations is vast and varied, and stretch from tribal development to education and medical service activities. The missionaries among nonprofit organizations have been running outstanding institutions of education since the last 100 years, producing academic giants having high moral standards, with their roots in India's cultural heritage. They organize camps for blindness prevention, polio vaccination, general health, eye operations, hygiene, and so on. They nurse the sick in cities, in villages, on war-fronts. They work towards elevating the status of slums. They fight for women's justice. They enrich the rural popu-

lation not only through the Green Revolution but also through the 'evergreen revolution,' as M.S. Swaminathan calls it, with developed agro-based technology. Many nonprofit institutions have drawn world attention and have earned international fame. In a word, the nonprofit organizations are the mainstay of the sustainable development of democratic India, especially in backward and underdeveloped areas. To know their role in future India, we should know what India was during pre-independence days.

Pre-Freedom India and its Present Ascent

What was the India that was left behind by the British on 15 August 1947? 'India was a far greater industrial and manufacturing nation,' wrote Sunderland, 'than any in Europe or than any other in Asia. Her textile goods—the fine products of her looms, in cotton, wool, linen, and silk—were famous over the civilized world; so were her exquisite jewellery and her precious stones cut in every lovely form; so were her pottery.' 'Such was the India which the British found when they came,' wrote Will Durant. Then began the British exploitation of India. They sold goods in England for \$10,000,000 which they bought for a mere \$2,000,000 in India. During the 19th century, India paid \$450,000,000 towards war expenses of England—wars fought outside India with the help of Indian troops. Some 7500 retired officials in Great Britain were drawing \$17,500,000 to \$20,000,000 in pensions from Indian revenue. According to a missionary paper, *The Indian Witness*, 'It is safe to assume that 100,000,000 of the popula-

tion of India have an annual income of not more than \$5 a head. The able-bodied agricultural labourer got \$3.60 per month. The national debt of India rose from \$35,000,000 in 1792 to \$3,500,000,000 in 1929. The government revenue from drinking licenses stood in 1922 at \$60,000,000. In 1911 a bill for universal compulsory primary education in India was defeated, resulting in 93% illiteracy of India.' According to the London-based *Spectator*, 'At least 1,00,000 lives were lost in the mutiny.' 'People lived virtually on the verge of starvation,' and India was exposed 'to the most sordid and criminal exploitation of one nation by another in all recorded history,' wrote Will Durant in his well-documented work, *The Case for India* (1930, pp. 2-48).

But India shook her centuries-old slavery and stood up through the sacrifice of thousands of her glorious sons and daughters. Many of them were inspired by Vivekananda's words. Romain Rolland saw the rise of a rejuvenated India with the mesmeric words of Vivekananda, just as Lazarus rose from death with the words of Christ: 'Lazarus, rise forth!' Hundreds of nationalists laid down their lives to bring freedom to their motherland. Mahatma Gandhi, inspired by Vivekananda's writings, became a beggar for his nation and his people. Tagore wrote about Gandhi: 'He stopped at the thresholds of the thousands of dispossessed, dressed like one of their own....' At Gandhi's call India blossomed forth to new greatness.

Today, after 52 years of independence, the scenario is almost diametrically changed. In almost all branches of science and technology India holds a respectable position in the world. Indian brains have earned global recognition, including the winning of the Nobel Prize and other international awards. Indian teachers, musicians, philosophers, scientists, artists and so on are leading figures in many parts of the world. At the end of 1998, India's population stood at 97.34 million, per capita GDP at \$1,500, exports at \$34.9 billion, foreign reserves at \$26.6 billion (*Asiaweek*, 25.12.1998-1.1.1999, p. 120). Self-sufficiency in food and

other factors have pushed down the inflation rate in July 1999 to below 2% (compared to 14.8% in December 1998). The latest FDI in 1999 rose to nearly \$30 billion compared to \$3.3 billion in 1997. In July 1999, India was amongst the 'fast-growing economies' in the world, and stood sixth in the world in terms of economic development (*Indian Express*, Rajkot, 19.7.99, p. 9).

Who are the Welfare People?

The nonprofit institutions are 'human being-agents'. The 'product' is a cured poor patient, an orphan raising a sweet home, an illiterate labourer's son getting a PhD, a blind man running a lathe machine, a disabled person earning a decent livelihood, a young man or woman growing into a self-respecting adult, a human life changed altogether. That is the kind of human beings that the nonprofit institutions dream to create through their dedicated service. Even after fifty years of its independence, India thrives on the services of the nonprofit organizations.

Before discussing welfare service, a primary question comes up: welfare for whom, and for what? For making people perpetually dependent on welfare, or for making people ultimately independent of welfare? The American 'welfare mess' arises partly from many black unwed 'welfare mothers' who are permanently on 'Aid to Families' with dependent children (37% of the welfare population is black where blacks are only 13% of the total population). Similarly in the United Kingdom the 'welfare underclass' are sufferers from the same social anomie—the state of alienation an individual experiences after a collapse of moral standards in life—with consequent destruction of personality, competence and self-respect. The percentage of chronic welfare recipients due to illegitimate children is well past 30 in the UK. Germans call these groups 'welfare cripples,' who also include alcoholics, young skinheads and neo-Nazis who need money for 'kicks' (Peter Drucker, *Managing in a Time of Great Change*, Pp. 318-19). In USA today 48% of the citizens carry some kind of guns. Even children go on

shooting sprees. *Time* (20 December 1992) said that the USA is in the grip of a 'gun civilization.'

Do we want that kind of a welfare society based on only sensate enjoyments and economic reductionism, ending in neurosis, drug-addiction, or split personalities? Certainly not. It is India which gave to the world the glorious dimension of human beings as being the children of immortality: not born sinners, but born gods. Aristotle conceived human beings as 'political animals'; Freud thought of them as 'biological animals'; Benjamin Franklin as 'tool-making animals'. Today, Alvin Toffler speaks of human beings as 'economic animals'. Ages ago, India conceived of man as biologically limited but spiritually unlimited due to the presence of the infinite non-physical Self—the Atman within. What a successful human being needs today is the combination of Western dynamism and excellence in external life, combined with Eastern excellence in the internal, ethical and spiritual life. India's nonprofit organizations, knowingly or unknowingly, have long been toeing this line of thought. The result is the making of a great India at the doorstep of the 21st century.

The Inspiration Behind Nonprofit Organizations

Some years ago, the *British Financial Times* gave a performance list of various systems. Some of them are as follows:

Socialism: You have two cows, and you give one to your neighbour.

Communism: You have two cows; the government takes both and gives you milk.

Capitalism: You have two cows; you sell one of them and buy a bull.

The paper forgot one system, the voluntary service system. In it, if you have two cows, you buy a bull, raise the number of cows to a hundred, and use the milk in the service of the needy.

Fifty years ago no one talked of nonprofit organizations or nonprofit sectors. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* did not even list the

term 'organization' in the 'current meaning' list of its 1950 edition. It was only after the Second World War that 'organization', as discrete and distinct from society's other institutions, emerged (Peter Drucker, op. cit., p. 85). Yet great organizations, working with intense practicality, emerged in India much earlier. For instance, on 1 May 1897, the Ramakrishna Mission was born. Today, according to Peter Drucker, 'nonprofit institutions are central to American society and are indeed its most distinguishing feature.' With every second American adult serving as a volunteer in the nonprofit sector and spending at least three hours a week in nonprofit work, the nonprofit institutions are Americans' largest employer, says Drucker (*Managing the Nonprofit Organization*).

What inspires voluntary organizations to offer this nonprofit service? To understand this, we should know something about work ethics itself. No one goes to work unless one gets joy out of it. What is the joy that dedicated people get through their service? Certainly not pay, prospect or promotion. What could be the joy then? Christ said: 'He that loses his life for my sake shall gain it.' In the *Taittiriya Upaniṣad*, it is said: 'Human beings are born in bliss, live in bliss and die in bliss.' This bliss, arising out of unselfish, respectful service to others, is the motive behind selfless work.

Excessive competition in many societies has led to overwork and restlessness. Without a spiritual background, workers and executives urged to work beyond the limits of their normal strength have turned into psychological wrecks. People go to work without knowing the spiritual basis of their lives. They do not know what is there within them. It was Indian thought which declared thousands of years ago that behind the body-mind complex there is the eternal source of all energy—the Atman. It is this Atman that is the source, the power, behind all our activities. The *Kena Upaniṣad* declares: 'Strength comes from the Self within, *ātmanā vindate vīryam*.' Most people who merely work do not know

how to unearth the strength from the infinite source within them through either meditation or yoga. The result, in many cases, is the birth of a crisis, 'a sense of purposelessness.' There is always disappointment and lack of satisfaction in work. There is no joy. It was Swami Vivekananda who for the first time brought out the spiritual truths and applied them to everyday life so that everyone down to the lowest human being may be benefited fully by it. How he did that will be discussed as you read on.

Nonprofit people have understood the secret. Unselfish work will slowly unfurl the strength within, they understand. This will bring peace and blessedness in their lives, they understand. This understanding is what brings a new direction to them and makes them work with dedication for the good of others. 'Unselfishness is more paying, only people have not the patience to practise it,' says Vivekananda. He adds that it is more paying from the point of view of health also. The over-working, over-ambitious people who work in offices and organizations everywhere, who lead frustrated lives, should be offered this alternative lifestyle, by showing that dedicated, unselfish service brings the highest fulfilment, bliss and joy in life.

Though all nonprofit organizations are as a rule NGOs, not all NGOs work as nonprofit service organizations. But that is what everyone expects: all NGOs should be nonprofit institutions, catering to people's needs selflessly, with devotion and dedication. That is the need of the hour in order to bring about a sea change in the nation. The NGOs have every potential to orient themselves towards elevating the masses through selfless, voluntary service. They must take up the task so as to make India a world leader in the 21st century.

The Need of the Hour

What is the motive behind the service activities of nonprofit organizations? It is certainly not conversion, or the fashioning of denationalized or dogmatic Indian citizens. To have one's roots in the age-old national culture is a must for a meaningful life. A

person who forgets his own past or the names of his parents is mad. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote in 1942:

One of the remarkable developments of the present age has been the rediscovery of the past and the nation. This going back to national traditions has been most marked in the ranks of labour, and the proletarian elements, who were supposed to be the foremost champions of international action.¹

What shall we say about our neo-intellectuals, who are extremely knowledgeable about the latest in science and technology but are unfortunately ignorant about, and even antagonistic to, their nation's past heritage and culture? Vivekananda called every man a traitor who, having been educated at the expense of the millions, does not pay the least heed to them. What about our young graduates on whom the nation spends 40-50 million rupees for their engineering or medical degrees, and who leave the nation even through campus interviews, with the attraction of a fat-salaried job abroad, absolutely ignoring the need of their own village, city or nation?

An organization's greatness depends on its ideals and activities which are directed towards the good of the nation, and not to the benefit of a single group. Ultimately, what is good for the nation and the world is good for the organization too. Mr Wilson of General Motors said in 1953, 'What is good for the United States is good for General Motors.' This holds good, in a sense, to all nonprofit organizations in India whose watchwords should be, 'What is good for India is good for the organization.' Long before the League of Nations or the United Nations was born, it was Swami Vivekananda who declared in India in 1897 of the need of an international outlook:

There cannot be any progress without the whole world following in the wake, and it is becoming every day clearer that the solution of any problem can never be at-

1. Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*.

tained on racial, or national, or narrow grounds.²

It is not that the East will have to learn everything from the West or vice versa; but each will have to contribute and hand down to future generations what it has for the accomplishment of that age-old dream of an ideal world—the harmony of nations. International organizations, international combinations, international laws are the cry of the day, and this shows the global solidarity.

With regard to a faith that merely ends in church or temple or mosque, Vivekananda believed that 'organization always breeds new evils.' The *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* says that in the final realization of the one Divinity in all beings, even the Vedas become unnecessary to a seer (*tatra vedā vedā bhavanti*).

Scholars of history feel that religion is 'increasingly likely to intrude into international affairs, resulting in inter-civilizational clash of culture and religion.' This remark is about the popular notion of religion. Unless religions are backed by a universal perspective, they are bound to engender group interests and encourage both international and intra-national clashes. Not only tolerance but respectful acceptance of the universal elements of other religions is the need of the hour so as to make our multi-religious India free from inter-religious clashes. The earlier we develop this attitude of acceptance and respect for other religions the better for India.

Elevation of Life-status: the End of Service

With mere economic and physical comforts the masses are liable to become slaves to the senses. That is why Vivekananda asked Indians to provide all the three kinds of service to the masses, to bring about a proper elevation to life: *annadāna* is providing physical and economic needs; *vidyādāna* is providing secular and scientific knowledge for developing potentialities and making people socio-economically independent; *dharmadāna*

is the gift of spiritual culture for holding fast to their divine nature without collapsing into the suicidal ends of a techno-society.

Vivekananda prophesied in 1896 that the most powerful thought wave to come in future was that of the 'Immanent God'—God manifest in human beings. 'Once again in our day there is a vibration of the waves of thought and the central idea is that of the Immanent God, and this is everywhere cropping up in every form and every sect.'³ It is his master Sri Ramakrishna's teaching of service to Siva in the *jīva*, based on the constant vision of God as immanent in all beings, high or low, that brought forth Vivekananda's futuristic vision of the 'Immanent God'. All service activities—social, economic, technological—should aim at bringing out neither a selfish giant nor a blood-sucking politician, but a human being in whom the higher altruistic self has been awakened, a servant of the people, a lover of humanity, a man of high moral character. The Nobel Prize-winning historian, Arnold J. Toynbee, found that a spiritual awakening in all human beings is the distinctive outcome of the service activities of the Ramakrishna Movement in India. He wrote in the 1960s:

In history books written fifty years or a hundred years from now, I do not think Sri Ramakrishna's name will be missing.... I am thinking particularly of the community development work. This is helping the peasants, in the hundreds of thousands of Indian villages, to realize that they can do something, by their own efforts, to make their lives better. Making them better means making them better materially as a means to making them better spiritually—and this brings us back to religion and to Sri Ramakrishna.⁴

(to be continued)

2. Swami Vivekananda, *Complete Works* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), Vol. 3, p. 269. [Hereafter *Complete Works*.]

3. *Complete Works*, Vol. 6, p. 134.

4. Quoted from *Vedanta and the West*, Vol. 141, p.10.

An American with a Hindu Vision

DR SATISH K. KAPOOR

We celebrate Amos Bronson Alcott's 200th birth anniversary by way of publishing this special article. The author, a former British Council scholar in history at SOAS, University of London, is a senior postgraduate lecturer in history at Lyallpur Khalsa College, Jalandhar City.

Educator, abolitionist, poet, author, and a prominent transcendentalist of the United States, Amos Bronson Alcott was much influenced by the writings of Plato, Coleridge and Neoplatonists, the Bible, the verses of the Koran and the *Zend-Avesta* as by the Hindu religious texts, specially the *Bhagavadgītā*. Hindu concepts such as the organic unity of life, the sacredness of the Self, vegetarianism, and the divinity of human nature echo in his *Orphic Sayings* which he contributed to *The Dial* (Boston), the transcendentalist journal, edited first by Margaret Fuller and later by Emerson.

Born near Wolcott, Connecticut, on 29 November 1799, Alcott worked as a pedlar (a person selling small articles going from house to house) in Virginia and the Carolinas (1818-23) before undertaking teaching assignments in different schools in Connecticut, Boston and Germantown (the northwest part of Philadelphia) during 1823-33. Irked by the insular and pedagoguish nature of education and stimulated by the educational writings of Pestalozzi (1746-1827) and Elizabeth Peabody, he opened an infant school at the Masonic Temple, Boston (22 September 1834), to experiment with new methods of teaching. He laid stress on physical culture, music and games, and encouraged children to think and work independently. He employed the dialogic method to sharpen the ratiocinative faculty of his students. His open discussion of such unconventional ideas as human anatomy and reproduction roused the ire of many parents and the school finally closed down

(1839) despite Emerson's efforts to sustain it.

After the failure of his educational experiment, Alcott spent about three years in Concord, where he looked after his small farm and discussed philosophy and social reform with Emerson (1803-82), Thoreau (1817-62), Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-64) and other transcendentalists. In 1842, he made a sojourn to England and met Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) who likened him to Don Quixote.

Alcott's passion for a better society based on communitarian ethos and the concept of vegetarianism found expression in Fruitlands (near Harvard), which he established in association with his English friends Henry Wright and Charles and William Lane in 1842. But, as before, the experiment proved abortive. In 1859 he became the superintendent of Concord schools but continued his passion for writing and lecturing on a wide range of subjects, including dialectics, racial discrimination, politics, ethics, and theology. During these years his family faced penury and privation till his daughter, Louisa May Alcott (1832-88), earned fame and money with the publication of *Little Women* (1868-69). Alcott became paralytic in the evening of his life but the visionary in him remained active till he breathed his last in Boston, Massachusetts, on 4 March 1888.

Several books have been written on the life and works of Alcott. Of them, F.B. Sanborn and W.T. Harris's work *A. Bronson Alcott: His Life and Philosophy* (Boston, 1893), O. Shephard's *Pedlar's Progress: The Life of Bron-*

son Alcott (Boston, 1937) and Dorothy McCuskey's *A. Bronson Alcott, Educator* (a research dissertation, Yale, 1936) are important.

Alcott preferred knowledge to money, intuition to dry reason, simplicity to ostentatious living, and innovation to stereotyped pursuits. His view of a personal God clearly derives from the *Bhagavadgītā* (17.4), which says that the object of a man's worship depends on his temperament and disposition.¹ 'As the man so his God; God is his idea of excellence; the complement of his own being.'² Likewise, the description in the *Bhagavadgītā* (Chapter 2) of the soul as eternal, immutable and unchangeable, and as forming the basis of ephemeral existence, permeates his writings when he says: 'There can be no sublimity of life without faith in the soul's eternity.'³ 'Matter is ever pervaded and agitated by the omnipresent soul. All things are instinct with Spirit.'⁴ 'Spirit is all in all.'⁵

Alcott's view that God, individual and nature constitute the divine synthesis comes close to the Vedanta philosophy, although he never elaborates upon it. He seems to have borrowed the Upanishadic idea that man could attain to divinity. 'Every soul feels at times her own possibility of becoming a god; she cannot rest in the human; she aspires after the godlike.'⁶ To experience divinity it was necessary to transcend the sensory level, break the shackles of social customs, ignore 'the haunts of an ignoble past'⁷ and lead a life of virtue.

The demoniac traits such as egotism, lust, insolence, anger and greed which im-

pede a soul's journey towards the Supreme, as mentioned in the *Bhagavadgītā* (Chapter 16)⁸ find echo in Alcott's writings. In *Orphic Sayings*, he writes: 'Engage in nothing that cripples or degrades you.... First cast the demons from your own bosom and then shall your words exorcise them from the hearts of others.'⁹ Alcott's view of morality was also influenced by Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia*. The American edition of this masterpiece on the Buddha's life was made possible through his efforts.

Like a man of devotion, Alcott gives precedence to the heart over the head, regarding the former as 'the prophet of one's soul.' He exhorted the youth to trust the 'instinctive auguries' of the heart, 'observe the oracular signals and remain enthusiastic. 'Enthusiasm,' he wrote in *Orphic Sayings*, 'is the glory and hope of the world. It is the life and sanctity of genius...and has wrought all miracles since the beginning of time.'¹⁰

Alcott's plan to issue a series of books on humanity's sacred scriptures, mythologies, mystics and philosophers remained on paper. But he produced many works often laced with lofty and imaginary ideas. Prominent among them are: *Observations on the Principles and Methods of Infant Instruction* (1830); *Conversations with Children on the Gospels* (1836-

7. Ibid., VI, VIII. Alcott elaborated this point saying, 'Let me live superior to sense, vigilant always, and I shall experience my divinity; my hope will be infinite, nor shall the universe contain, or content me. But if I creep daily from the haunts of an ignoble past, like a beast from his burrow, neither earth nor sky, man nor God, shall appear desirable or glorious; my life shall be loathsome to me, my future reflect my fears. He alone, who lives nobly, oversees his own being, believes all things, and partakes of the eternity of God' (Ibid., IV).

8. The demoniac traits are mentioned in verses 4-6 and the demoniac ways in verses 7-18.

9. *Orphic Sayings*, V.

10. Ibid., II.

1. *Yajante sātṭvikā devān-yakṣarakṣāṁsi rājasāḥ; Pretān-bhūtagaṇāṁścānye yajante tāmasā janāḥ.* 'Sātṭvic people worship the devas; rājasic, the yakṣas and the rākṣasas; the others—the tāmasic ones—the pretas and the hosts of bhūtas.'

2. *Orphic Sayings*, III.

3. Ibid., IV.

4. Ibid., XXXVI.

5. Ibid., XXXIII.

6. Ibid., X.

37); *Tablets* (1868); *Concord Days* (1872); *Table Talk* (1877); *Sonnets and Canzonets* (1882); and *New Connecticut: An Autobiographical Poem* (1887).

Alcott's mystical vision influenced his educational ideas. He regarded the cultivation of 'self culture' as the foremost duty of a student. The grander one's conception of being, the nobler one's future, he said. To him education was a total concept involving the development of body, mind and soul. Physical strength and stamina could be gained by playing games; the mind could be sharpened by dialogue and discussion; and the soul could be elevated by self-analysis. He preferred independent thinking to dogma, gymnastics to cloistered learning, music to sermons, and library work to classroom notes. He exhorted his pupils to have confidence and faith in themselves and work with single-minded devotion. 'Either subordinate your vocation to your life or quit it for ever.'¹¹ In his view enthusiasm and hope could lend a greater perseverance to human effort. 'The heart is the prophet of your soul, and ever

fulfils her prophecies; reason is her historian; but for the prophecy the history would not be.... Hope deified men; it is the apotheosis of the soul; the prophecy and fulfilment of her destinies,' he wrote in *Orphic Sayings*.¹²

Alcott believed that self-instruction rooted in self-analysis could help in self-realization and give one power to influence and transform others. He felt that the impact of a person on his environment was commensurate with the strength that he had discovered within himself.

Alcott favoured interaction between students and teachers and between teachers and parents. As the superintendent of schools in Concord he formed a parent-teacher organization. In the Temple School, Boston, he put into practise Elizabeth Peabody's educational ideas enumerated in *Record of a School Exemplifying the General Principles of Spiritual Culture* (1835). Alcott disdained colour prejudice and refused to turn out a Negro girl from the Boston school despite pressure from many quarters. □

11. Ibid., V.

12. Ibid., II.

What is Transcendentalism?

Transcendentalists were a group of writers and philosophers who were loosely bound together by adherence to an idealistic system of thought based on a belief in the essential unity of all creation, the innate goodness of man, and the supremacy of insight over logic and ordinary experience for the revelation of the deepest truths. To the New England Transcendentalists, German Transcendentalism, Platonism, Neo-platonism, and Indian and Chinese scriptures and writings were sources in their search for a liberating philosophy. New England Transcendentalism attracted such diverse figures like Emerson, Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, James Freeman Clarke, Bronson Alcott, et al. In their religious quest, the Transcendentalists rejected the conventions of 18th century thought, and what began in a dissatisfaction with Unitarianism developed into a repudiation of the whole established order. They advocated reform in church, state, and society, contributing to the rise of feminism, educational innovation, etc. The Pragmatism of John Dewey, the environmental planning of Benton MacKaye and Lewis Mumford, are all heavily indebted to Transcendentalism.

—retold from *Encyclopedia Britannica*

RELIGION AND LIFE

Swami Bhuteshanandaji's Answers to Questions

The questions and answers being serialized in these columns are not meant to be scholarly expositions of various issues. People from different walks of life used to meet Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj daily during his tenure as President of the Ramakrishna Order and discuss with him their problems and doubts, and Revered Maharaj would clear their doubts in a characteristically simple way. These questions and answers were recorded and read out to him before he approved them all for publication.

What is a pure mind?

A pure mind is that which does not admit any inauspicious thought: it is one in which no negative or harmful *vr̥ttis* arise. He who can remain free from attachments will not be affected by anything inauspicious. The mind can be purified through sustained practice. The idea that it is for your own well-being that purity of mind is needed should be firmly rooted in your mind. Freedom from attachment does not come naturally, of its own; it is attained through consistent, earnest endeavour.

Can the mind be steadied by repeating the name of God? By Harināma?

Yes! God's name is very powerful. It will certainly calm down the restless mind. Whether it is *Harināma* or *Rāmanāma* or *Kālināma*, repeat whatever name appeals to you. The vital thing is constant repetition, performed with sincerity and devotion.

Do we have to think of God always so as to increase our longing (vyākulatā) for Him?

Remembering Him always is called *japa*. *Vyākulatā* or intense longing is a state of mind which is spontaneous and which cannot be cultivated through conscious effort. If He is sought as the only goal or ideal of life, the only thing worth in life, then *vyākulatā* will be manifested in you. *Vyākulatā* grows of itself. When a mother chides her child, the child

cries, no doubt; but all the same, he repeats 'Mother', 'Mother' and clings to her.

Sometimes we feel yearning for God but it does not remain permanently—it sort of comes and goes. What is to be done about it?

Yes, at times there will be flashes of yearning, flashes of disgust for worldly attachments, flashes of longing for the Divine. However, they do not remain permanently because *Mahāmāyā* envelopes you again. The sun is seen rarely on a cloudy morning, but soon he disappears. All you can do is pray. The way out is to pray intensely and to renounce all worldly desires and ambitions. Say firmly that you want only God and nothing else, and act accordingly. Unless desire for worldly delights goes you cannot have acute aspiration for God.

Maharaj, who or what is an iṣṭa?

Whatever we long for is our *iṣṭa*.

Are guru and chosen deity (iṣṭa) one and the same?

Though there are some practical differences, the two are one and the same. Guru and *iṣṭa* are non-different. God is your all in all. It is like this: sand is Brahman and sesame seed is Brahman; but when you want oil, you do not grind sand but sesame seed. Do you not? If someone asks you about your *iṣṭa*, your answer should be, 'Your chosen deity is mine too, because there is only one God.'

In Bengali, they make a pun on the word mantra and say, 'Mind is yours (mon-tor). What is meant by 'mind is yours'?

A mantra is that by the constant and unceasing repetition of which you will be liberated from this terrible samsara. 'Mon-tor' is only playing a pun on it. Your mind is of course yours; can it be someone else's?

We are afraid to speak, and yet...

We tell you the secret that we know—

The secret whereby we ourselves,
and others, with our help,

Have passed through many a time of peril;
Now it all depends on you.

Does one have to prepare oneself in order to receive dikṣā?

Of course! You have to prepare yourself for *dikṣā*. Many do not have a clear idea of what initiation is. The mind needs to be purified and quietened before *dikṣā*. When the mind is eager to be initiated and has been purified, then only can the disciple grasp the significance of *dikṣā*. All are not equally eligible; amongst aspirants for initiation, those who are eager to know and are earnest in their spiritual pursuit will have better results. Otherwise, it will be like something kept stored in the mind for future use. I had given a talk on this subject sometime back and it was published too. If you find it you may read it. [Cf. Thoughts on Spiritual Life by Revered Maharaj, published by Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta. It contains this talk under the title, 'Significance of Spiritual Initiation'.]

What is meant by development in spiritual life?

You mean progress in spiritual life? Spirituality or *ādhyātmikā* relates to the Spirit. A clear understanding of the relation between life and the Atman is called *ādhyātmikā*. I shall not refer to the Self as being the controller of the physical and mental bodies,

but it is the only truth, the everlasting truth. As love for God increases, worldly pleasures lose their attraction—this process of gradual unfoldment is spirituality. The quality of *sattva* is predominant in spirituality. The indication of your spiritual progress is in the greater and greater manifestation of the *sattva* quality. That by which you can free your mind from the hold of worldliness and know about God's nature is the quality of *sattva*. However, *sattva* has its own limitations, and that is another matter. For the devotee, it is a gradual increase in the love of God. For the *jñāni*, it is the gradual purification of the mind, and conviction in the truth of the Atman or Brahman and the falsity of the universe and its objects.

What is the meaning of dikṣā?

Dikṣā implies taking a vow. To take a vow of making a beginning is called *dikṣā* (initiation). In other words, the vow to repeat God's name and the initiative towards it is *dikṣā*. Everybody makes a beginning no doubt, but not all ceremonially.

You can have *dikṣā* even without a human guru's aid. Your mind is the guru; he who is inside initiates you. On the other hand, not everyone gets initiated just because some mantra is whispered into his or her ears; if a great spiritual personality silently wishes you well and mentally gives some mantra, through that also you can be initiated. The point is eagerness on part of the disciple: when a guru gives initiation, the disciple should be earnest, because only if he is earnest to accept the teachings is he benefited. A disciple's devotion helps manifest power in the guru as well. Ekalavya was a shining example of extraordinary reverence to the teacher. He became a master of archery and other martial arts just by practising in front of the clay model of his guru.

—Compiled by Smt Manju Nandi Mazumdar

Chinese Buddhism and Vedanta - I

DR ALAN HUNTER

We thank Dr Alan Hunter for this brilliant study of Chinese Buddhism in Vedantic perspective to be published in parts. Dr Hunter holds degrees in Chinese Studies and Religious Studies. He has studied and worked in Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Singapore, and was until 1998 Senior Lecturer in Chinese Studies at the University of Leeds, UK. He has written several books about culture and religion in China, the most recent being Contemporary China (Macmillan, 1999). Dr Hunter also has a longstanding interest in Indian culture and has been associated with the Ramakrishna Mission since 1994. A part of the present series was presented at the Vedanta Conference held at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, in December 1997.

This paper describes some aspects of Chinese Buddhism that appear to have much in common with Indian Vedanta. It also notes developments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the Chinese Buddhist world that resemble Swami Vivekananda's neo-Vedantic concerns. On the theme of 'concepts and applications', one observes parallel ideas expressed in different linguistic and cultural forms in the Chinese Buddhist world and Swami Vivekananda's neo-Vedantic concerns; their practical implementation, for example the twentieth century emphasis on humanitarian work, is similar. The study raises further questions. For example, these two great traditions—Vedanta and Chinese Buddhism—have preserved profound religious practices for many centuries, so successfully that they are still vital currents in the contemporary world. How has this been achieved? Are the parallels between the traditions meaningful, or merely coincidental? Will there be a renewal of cultural and religious dialogue between India and China in the next century?

Considering that India and China are neighbours and two of the most powerful countries in Asia, their relative lack of interaction for many centuries is perhaps surprising. In the twentieth century, international politics, China's isolation, state ideology, in-

ternal conflicts, and the Sino-Indian border conflict kept relations frozen. China did not look to India for cultural imports, but rather to Russia (for Marxism) and to the West (for science). It was only in the mid-1990s that the two states made concerted efforts to improve relations. However, an earlier period had witnessed one of world history's great cultural processes, the transmission of Buddhism from India to China, thence to most of East Asia;¹ as we shall see, Chinese religious practices were also taken to India.

In the twentieth century, religion in China suffered greatly. A driving force of the Chinese elite throughout the century has been the search for modernization and national independence, and modernizers (adopting the sceptical rationalism of the mandarin) viewed religion as superstitious and feudalistic. At some periods this attitude degenerated into ferocious state-sponsored repression. There were an estimated three-quarters

1. This term refers to China, Tibet, Mongolia, Korea, and Japan. Parts of Southeast Asia, particularly Vietnam, also adopted forms of Chinese Buddhism. Almost all Chinese Buddhism forms part of the Mahayana tradition, rather than of the Theravada tradition that spread through Sri Lanka to Burma and Thailand.

of a million Buddhist monks and nuns in 1949, with numerous temples and monasteries, lay societies, publications, associations, pilgrimage destinations and so on. Taoism, the indigenous Chinese religion, was perhaps equally widespread. There were probably fewer than ten thousand surviving monastics by the 1980s, and the religious movements had either been devastated or gone underground. They have, however, been tolerated for the past fifteen years, and have staged a major revival. Yet the outside world's knowledge of these developments is rather limited: the language and culture are difficult; the communist government has been repressive; Christian missionaries used to provide ignorant and misleading reports about Chinese religion; some of the best monasteries were remote; and esoteric practices hard for the outsider to fathom. Nevertheless, religious traditions in China display great vitality even today, and we have much to learn from them.

Chan Buddhism

Buddhism in China in earlier times was organized into two schools, usually emanating from a revered founder monk and emphasizing particular doctrines and practices. Each school had its characteristic monasteries, pilgrimage sites, and iconography. Perhaps the best known is Chan Buddhism (later known as Zen in Japan). Other historically important ones are the Pure Land (devotional), Vinaya (stressing an austere monastic life), Hua-Yen (mystical and metaphysical), Esoteric (tantric and Tibetan), and Tiantai (eclectic, based on scriptural study and breath meditation). By about the fourteenth century, these different schools had more or less resolved into three main strands of Chinese Buddhism that survive today: Chan; Pure Land; and Esoteric.

The Chan school rose to prominence in the eighth century, but it traces its foundation to the great monk Bodhidharma, who is thought to have been the son of a king in southern India. He probably arrived in China in the late fifth century, practised austerities,

travelled widely, accepted disciples, and taught meditation. The Chan school claims that Bodhidharma had received an esoteric transmission in an unbroken chain of masters going back to the Sakyamuni Buddha himself. The transmission from master to disciple became a central feature of Chan Buddhism, and monks in contemporary China maintain that the tradition is still intact.

Chan emphasizes direct perception of Self and the attainment of Buddhahood. Only limited use of rituals and doctrinal study is sanctioned; the stress is on sudden illumination of consciousness through meditation. (Incidentally the name Chan itself implies this: it is the Chinese pronunciation of the Sanskrit term *dhyana*.) To help practitioners achieve their supreme goal, Chan masters used various meditation techniques, as in the following examples from the Venerable Xu Yun. Xu Yun was born in 1840 and entered monastic life at the age of nineteen. He lived as a hermit and mendicant monk for many years, studying with eminent teachers in China. He also visited Tibet, Bhutan, India, Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and Burma. One day in 1896, he arose after meditation in his room and saw the whole environment inside and outside his monastery, including monks and visitors, boats plying on the river, and distant trees. Two nights later an attendant accidentally splashed some boiling water onto Xu Yun's hand when pouring tea. Xu Yun dropped his teacup which fell to the floor and smashed, and he felt like someone awakening from a dream: 'space was pulverized and the mad mind came to a stop.' He taught: 'this singleness of mind will be thoroughly still and shining, in its imperturbable absoluteness, spiritual clarity, and thorough understanding, like the continuous smoke of a solitary fire.'² Xu Yun rebuilt many monasteries in China, held countless retreats, and taught numerous disciples. He died in 1959.

2. Lu K'uan Yu, *The Secrets of Chinese Meditation* (London: Rider, 1964), p. 51.

Xu Yun generally avoided display of his powers, although he was believed to have paranormal abilities. Some of his discourses, from which the following are abstracts, have been translated into English:

Always ask 'Who is reciting the mantra?' 'Who is taking a meal?' 'Who is sleeping?' The reply to 'Who?' will invariably be the same: 'It is Mind'. Word arises from Mind. Thought arises from Mind. The universe arises from Mind. To look into one's fundamental nature before birth is to look into the Mind. Mind is self-nature, it is awareness, and is Buddha, having neither form nor location, and being undiscoverable. It is clean and pure by nature, penetrates everywhere, does not enter or leave, neither comes nor goes, and is fundamentally the self-evident pure Buddha.

As Mind is intangible, one is not clear about it. Consequently some slight feeling of doubt arises about 'Who?' The doubt should not be coarse; the finer it is, the better. At all times and at all places, this doubt should be looked into unremittingly, like an ever-flowing stream. If the doubt fades, one should gently give rise to it again. Beginners will find it more effective in a still place than amidst disturbance; later one should remain indifferent

and take no notice of either stillness or disturbance. One should work at the training with singleness of mind.

A practitioner should keep under control all his sense-organs and constantly look into where a thought usually arises, until he perceives his pure self-nature, free from all thoughts. This continuous, close, quiet, and disinterested investigation will lead to a still and shining contemplation. The five *skandhas* [form, feeling, ideation, reaction, and consciousness] will be non-existent. Both body and mind will be wiped out, without the least thing being left behind. Thereafter, maintain absolute immutability in every state while walking, standing, sitting, and lying, by day or by night. As time goes on, this fruition will be brought to perfection, resulting in the perception of self-nature and the attainment of Buddhahood, with the elimination of all distress and suffering.³

Similarities with teachings of Indian masters are immediately apparent, for example the technique of plunging into the source of thought and I-consciousness.

(to be continued)

3. Ibid., extracts from Chapter Two: 'Self Cultivation According to the Ch'an (Zen) School'.

Guru Nanak: A Revolutionary Reformer

(continued from page 850)

against the strongest current that could ever be, all through his life; how he had to fight meanness and differences. What was this wonderful saint's contribution to humanity? 'Guru Nanak sowed the seeds of spiritual

democracy. The process of its germination and growth is still in progress and will continue to flourish; for, his message is for the world at large.'⁹ □

9. *Spokesman*.

The Ramakrishna Movement in Japan

SWAMI MEDHASANANDA

How is Vedanta doing in the Land of the Rising Sun? The author, head of the Nippon Vedanta Kyokai, gives a pleasant account of it here.

The Mission

The Vedanta Society of Japan, started in 1958 and affiliated to the Ramakrishna Mission in 1984, is located in Zushi, about 50 km southeast of Tokyo. Its activities include holding of regular services, celebrations, discourses, and retreats in and outside the centre. There is also a library, and books are published in Japanese. The centre also publishes a bimonthly magazine in Japanese, *Fumetsu no Kotoba* (*The Universal Gospel*).

The Growth of the Nation

Japan, the Land of the Rising Sun, consists of four main islands, stretching from North to South in the Pacific Ocean. The language is Japanese, and the major religions are Shintoism and Buddhism. Japan, with its beautiful landscape of seas, mountains and forests, rich in flora and fauna, is wonderfully picturesque. Although geographically located in Asia, it is situated far enough from the mainland to have escaped involvement in many of the continent's upheavals, yet is close enough to have richly benefited from continental Asian cultures.

Japanese culture has been largely influenced by China and, to a lesser degree, by Korea. Religiously, Japan has been greatly influenced by India through both China and Korea. In the modern era, Japan was nudged into the process of modernization by Europeans in the 19th century and later by the United States in the 20th. Japan has assimilated these influences into its own tradition and needs. Despite the onslaught of westernization, many cultural traits remain wholly Japanese. Some of the older traditions hold great sway over the people's psyche, and Japan can, at

times, appear to be an insular nation to outsiders.

A very brief view of Japan's religious traditions will give readers a better understanding of the spiritual environment into which the Ramakrishna Movement was ushered in.

Shintoism, the native religion of Japan, preaches the worship of nature, ancestors, and the emperor, who is believed to be of divine origin. All these, but especially the worship of the emperor, have contributed to the proverbial patriotism of the Japanese. Confucianism, which spread to Japan from China, taught such moral values as respect for elders, self-discipline, and performance of one's duty with utmost devotion. Buddhism, which entered Japan in the 6th century CE from India through China and Korea, enriched the religious ideas and practices of Japan and contributed to various aspects of the nation's culture.

Initially, Japan, like many countries where Buddhism had taken hold, witnessed a great many monks willing to renounce and devote themselves entirely to spiritual practice. Over the centuries, long-established centres of ecclesiastical training focused on philosophical wisdom, strict moral discipline and mystic ceremonies, but their systems of hierarchy and collusion with seats of power had a corruptive effect. Occasionally, dissatisfied monks would leave to preach new tenets, some of which developed into new branches of Buddhism, such as occurred around the year 1200.

The end of the 12th century experienced a great upheaval with the establishment of a

new military government at Kamakura. This was not a mere political change, but a revolt by the warrior and peasant classes against the over-refinement of the aristocracy. It was a time of social, moral and religious upheaval as well, and a new 'easy method' of salvation called *Amita* or *Jodo* Buddhism was proposed by a monk named Hohnen. This school taught that simple faith in Buddha's grace was all that one needed to cross this ocean of samsara to the *Jodo* or 'Pure Land', and required only the chanting of the Lord's name.

Later, theoretical arguments that one's own spiritual effort was in itself a denial of Buddha's grace gave way to even 'easier' methods such as the ones taught by Shinran and Nichiren. Shinran declared simply, 'Neither virtue nor wisdom, but faith.' He discarded his monastic robes, married, and taught that faith itself was Buddha's free gift to all. Many converted to these 'easy' paths and ever fewer seekers sought salvation through monastic life.

Throughout these periods of political and social change, however, Buddhism persisted and received state patronage during the Middle Ages. Then, in 1868, it was permanently and violently replaced by Shintoism as the state religion with the onset of the Meiji Restoration era. After centuries of enjoying official favour, Buddhism suddenly lost its position and Buddhists were subjected to severe torture and humiliation by the government and its most zealous supporters. Most of the Buddhist monks, who had lived lives of celibacy, were forced to marry in order to bring them in line with the practices of Shinto priests. The properties of Buddhist temples and monasteries were confiscated, temples demolished, and their scriptures burnt.

All these factors contributed to the degradation of Buddhism in Japan, and the Japanese were deprived of the guidance and inspiration of a religion based on renunciation, service to humanity and universal love in the name of God. Without such ideals to follow and inspire, no nation—no matter how mate-

rially enriched it may be—can have a firm mooring, and is bound to drift with a feeling of void at heart.

Although early followers of Christianity suffered severe persecution from the 16th to early 19th centuries, the religion began spreading throughout Japan in the middle of the 19th century. Today, Christianity has a considerable number of followers and its missionaries play an important role in imparting modern education, especially to Japanese women.

Vivekananda and Japan

This is roughly the religious background of Japan towards the end of the 19th century. In 1893 Swami Vivekananda made a brief stopover and visited some of its important cities on his way to the Parliament of Religions in the USA. Although he did not give a formal lecture on Vedanta at that time, he did make an impression on those Japanese who had the privilege of meeting him. Observing the resemblance of his face with that of the Buddha, many referred to him as the 'second Buddha.' Swamiji, in turn, was deeply impressed by such positive qualities of Japanese character as patriotism, hard work, power of assimilation, cleanliness and aesthetic sense, to name but a few. Swamiji later referred to these good qualities of the Japanese before his Indian audiences on a number of occasions. He observed that Indians, especially the nation's youth, would be benefited by studying secular matters in Japan, just as the Japanese would benefit from the study of Indian spirituality. It was only after Swamiji had become a world figure in the field of



Kakuzo Okakura

religion by preaching Vedanta in the West that attempts were made by some prominent Japanese, including the Japanese Consul at Calcutta and Kakuzo Okakura, a renowned art critic (hence called 'Tenshin'), to bring Swamiji to Japan to preach his message. One of Swamiji's close American friends and devotees, Miss Josephine MacLeod, went to Japan in 1901 and worked behind the scenes to try and bring this about.

Due to Swamiji's failing health, however, a second visit was never realized; and considering some of the social and political circumstances that prevailed in Japan at the time, the question arises as to whether the country was ready to receive the message of Vedanta from Swami Vivekananda then. It should also be noted that with the onset of the Meiji era, the country reversed its policy of isolation and made an all-out effort to transform itself into a modern country, following the Western model.

In this process of modernization, Japan replaced many of its age-old systems and values with those from the West. Not satisfied with these changes alone, the country began to cherish lofty political and economic ambitions. Japan aspired to become a competitor of Western colonization by pursuing foreign policies similar to those of the 'Monroe Doctrine' adopted by the USA. Such a strategy would serve to oust Western imperialists from the Far East and Southeast Asia, while enhancing Japan's own power and influence in the region. As we know from history, these policies led to Japan's unfortunate involvement in the Second World War and, finally, a humiliating defeat. This led the country into a period of deep national frustration.

Nevertheless, after a tragic but temporary setback Japan is once again on the global stage as one of the world's economic superpowers, due to hard work, strong determination, and unity of purpose and sacrifice for the country, all of which exemplify the positive aspects of Japanese character.

The Seeds of Indian Thought

Compared with the Korean and Chinese, the Indian community in Japan is rather small. Indians began visiting and settling in Japan in the late 19th century for job-skill training, business opportunities, and jobs. Among the distinguished Indians who visited Japan in the first half of this century were Swami Trigunatitananda and Swami Abhedananda, two direct monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, Rabindranath Tagore, and two of India's great freedom fighters, Rashbehari Bose and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.

In 1931, Romain Rolland's biography of Vivekananda was translated into Japanese and was probably the first publication of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature available to Japanese readers.

An academy for the study of Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Vedanta, which was started in 1957 by Mr Narayan Uchigaki in collaboration with some Japanese and Indians near Osaka, became a society around 1960. This society also published some books on Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples. And although the society used to keep in with the Ramakrishna Order, in course of time it began preaching its own cult beliefs and is now limited to a small number of followers in Japan and the USA.

When the present President of the Ramakrishna Order, Swami Ranganathanandaji, visited Japan in 1958 on a lecture tour sponsored by the Indian government, he inspired many, including Professor Nikki Kimura and Mr V.S. Rao, to form a society to study and preach the ideas of Vedanta and Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. Accordingly, the Vedanta Society was formed in November 1958. Prof Kimura, Professor Emeritus of Risshyo University, had lectured at Calcutta University for some time, as he had lived in India for 22 years, and was proficient in Bengali. An admirer of the Ramakrishna Mission, Prof Kimura became the newly formed Society's first president, while Mr Rao, a retired Indian officer of the British Indian Army, who had

settled in Japan in 1953, became the first secretary.

On 2 May 1959, the Society was formally inaugurated by Swami Nikhilananda, head of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York, on his way back to New York from India, at a public meeting attended by Sir C.P.N. Singh, the Indian Ambassador to Japan, and some Japanese scholars. Swami Ranganathanandaji was not only the inspiration behind the Ramakrishna Movement in Tokyo, he also impressed the Indian government enough to release an annual grant to the Society for its activities. This grant, which was a substantial amount in those days, brought great financial relief to the fledgling Society.

The Society then began translating Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature from English into Japanese, publishing a magazine, and organizing talks by the visiting monks of the Ramakrishna Order. Members would also meet regularly and undertake some spiritual programmes. Mr Lokumal K. Chellaram, a Hong Kong-based Indian businessman and chairman of the Chellaram group of companies, made a lumpsum donation of £5000. This and other donations from the Japanese and local Indian community were used to purchase a small plot of land and erect a little house in Zushi, a small coastal resort town some 50 km southeast of Tokyo, in 1970.

With the construction of 'Holy Mother's House', Mrs Haru Nakai, a devotee of great resolution who had joined the Society in 1960, began living there. She dedicated her life to the cause of the Society, having engaged herself in interpreting talks, translating articles and books, editing the centre's magazine and rendering various other services to the Kyokai for more than three decades. To her credit she has translated most of the books hitherto published by the Kyokai.

The Holy Mother's House also accommodated the devotees and monks of the Ramakrishna Order visiting Japan. Swami Bhaskarananda of the Vedanta Society of Se-

attle, USA, visited the Japan Society quite often in the 1970s and it was on these occasions that members got an opportunity to mix closely with a monk of the Ramakrishna

Order and

learn more about the Order's ideals, objectives and traditions.

A second, larger building that was to become the centre's Ashrama and main campus in later years, was built in 1978. The site is a ten-minute walk from Holy Mother's House and the land purchase and construction were made possible by lumpsum donation from Mrs Nakai and Mr H.R. Gajaria, an Indian businessman, as well as contributions received from Japanese and Indian devotees and well-wishers. During the first visit of Swami Bhuteshanandaji, then Vice-President of the Order, the new Ashrama was conse-



Holy Mother's House



Vedanta Society of Japan

crated on 7 May 1978 in the presence of a large gathering.

Swami Bhuteshanandaji visited the Japan centre many times after that, but on his last visit in 1990 he came in the capacity of President of the Order. His spirituality, erudition, keen sense of humour and, above all, his extremely loving nature, had a tremendous impact on all who met him, and he drew members from far and near from across Japan. His discourses and private spiritual instruction, and his holy and loving company were quite moving and fascinating, and a good number of the Society's members received initiation from him.

Thus, the visits of Swami Bhuteshanandaji helped the Japanese devotees to identify themselves not only with the local centre but also with the Ramakrishna Order. Many of them started visiting Ramakrishna Math and Mission centres in Calcutta and the headquarters at Belur Math. All these activities helped pave the way for the affiliation of the Vedanta Society of Japan (Nippon Vedanta Kyokai) to the Ramakrishna Mission in 1984. Mr V.S. Rao, the founder-secretary of the Japan Society, played a key role in the direction and running of the Society, through all its ups and downs, for more than two decades since inception to eventual affiliation with the Mission.

Swami Siddharthananda was the first monk assigned as president of the Vedanta Society of Japan by the Order in June 1984. In his capacity as secretary to Swami Bhuteshanandaji, Swami Siddharthananda had visited the centre twice before and had met its members. As such, a rapport already existed between him and the Japanese devotees, making the transition somewhat smoother and his stay in Japan that much easier. Thus, the long-cherished desire of Swami Vivekananda to do something for Japan, expressed on the very day that he passed away, was finally fulfilled more than 80 years later.

With the full-time presence of a resident monk, the Society's membership soon saw a

sea of difference. Leadership naturally fell to the resident monk, whose first duty was to streamline activities according to the traditions and ideals of the Ramakrishna Order. This was no easy task.

The Swami rose to the occasion and introduced the routine lifestyle of an Ashrama, including spiritual programmes of meditation, evening services, etc. Regular birthday celebrations of the great trio of the Order and



The Society's shrine

Buddha and Christ were introduced. Discourses, retreats and private interviews began. The publication of new titles was undertaken and sales systems were greatly improved. Through these activities the centre witnessed a steady inflow of visitors. Some even lived there to derive the benefit of the Ashrama atmosphere and to help the Swami run the centre. Most visitors were, of course, Japanese, but the Swami kept close contact with the Indian community as well.

The Swami had learnt some Japanese too, but unfortunately his Japanese skills would never be fully utilized, as his health began to fail, and after nearly a decade of pioneering work, he left the country in December 1993.

The author of this article, the current head, took charge that same December and carried on the activities of his predecessor. In the midst of carrying on these duties, however, the Swami continually pondered ways to spread the message of Ramakrishna-

Vivekananda to an even wider Japanese audience. It was then that a unique opportunity arose. It turned out that the very year of his posting coincided with the centenary of Swami Vivekananda's visit to Japan. The Swami seized upon this auspicious opportunity to celebrate the centenary of Vivekananda's visit to Japan to present Swamiji's message on a larger scale.

An organizing committee consisting of Japanese and Indian devotees and well-wishers was formed, with the Indian Ambassador chosen as chief patron. This committee set about making preparations for a large public celebration, to be held in a rented hall in Tokyo. Encouraged by the success of this event, it was decided that a public celebration of Swamiji's birth be held every year, and the event has been quite well received each year since then.

A growing number of local residents are becoming aware of these celebrations through the media, as some newspapers have shown special interest in the programme. Talks by prominent Japanese scholars and visiting monks of the Order, seminars on the harmony of religions, and attractive cultural programmes that include musical performances have been drawing large numbers of Japanese. A special issue of the Vedanta Society of Japan's magazine is published on the occasion, and the sale of Vedanta and Mission literature is also effective in reaching out to people.

The number of talks given both in and outside the centre have steadily increased, regular retreats in Kumamoto on the island of Kyushu, and occasional public talks in different cities around Japan have begun. At the time of writing this, however, the number of members of the Vedanta Society of Japan and subscribers to the bimonthly magazine is relatively small, but the number of Japanese who have become acquainted with the names of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda and some of their works is steadily growing.

In 1995, a one-hour interview on 'Sri



Retreat in Kumamoto

Ramakrishna and the Harmony of Religions' with Professor Tsuyoshi Nara, former professor of Tokyo Foreign Language University, was broadcast on the nation's public broadcast network NHK. This same programme was re-broadcast twice on later dates, which also greatly helped to make the Japanese aware of the message of Vedanta as propounded by Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. Additionally, Japanese books on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda and Indian religions have been published by sources other than the Vedanta Society. Visits to India by Japanese who come into contact with the Mission are increasing as well. All of these efforts are contributing to making the names and ideas of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda more familiar in Japan.

The Impact of the Movement

In Japan, growth of the Vedanta Movement is slow but steady. Generally speaking, the Japanese people are not particularly interested in religion even though many of them visit temples once in a while and perform religious rites on traditional occasions. The Japanese are liberal in the sense that they perform rites and visit places of worship of both Shinto and Buddhist religions. For example, marriages are held according to Shinto rites, while funerals are conducted according to Buddhist rites. These activities, however, are more about being Japanese traditions than a right spiritual understanding.

The Japanese have experienced both bit-

ter and sweet fruits of a modern, materialistic civilization over the past 100 years and an increasing number of Japanese, including the youth, are now searching for something to fill the spiritual void. This void can hardly be filled by the country's traditional religions, including Christianity, in their present forms; this has led numbers of spiritual seekers to try new religious sects, some of whose ideas are not only ambiguous

but also dangerous. The names of many popular Indian gurus have also become quite familiar to the Japanese in recent years, but it is also fair to say that, in at least some cases, it is the charming propaganda of these gurus that attracts the Japanese.

Some initially indifferent intellectuals and leaders of Japan are slowly realizing the positive role religion plays in any society. They are becoming aware that unless people are educated as to what does and does not constitute genuine religious ideas, the possibility of fake religious leaders misleading, cheating and causing great harm to the innocent will always remain. Vedanta, as preached by Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, is gradually being recognized as a modern, scientific, and universal religion, as perfectly suited to the needs of the Japanese people as it is to any nation of the modern world.

Japan's spiritual seekers who have read some Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature such as *Ramakrishna no Fukuin* (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*) or Swamiji's *Karma Yoga*, have confessed quite frankly that these are the

very works they have long been searching desperately for. They say that they not only received new insights but a better understanding and appreciation of their own religious faiths.

All these factors are paving the way for a glorious future for Vedanta in Japan. God-realization through the transformation of one's character and mental and spiritual ori-

entation cannot, of course, be accomplished overnight. In much the same way, Vedanta cannot be expected to sweep across Japanese society overnight either. Observation of the Japanese character has shown, however, that it is equally true that once the Japanese understand how Vedanta can bring real good and happiness into their lives at both micro and macro levels, more and more will



Members practising meditation at the Society

come to embrace it.

Vedanta can be expected to grow steadily in Japan, but it will not do so at the expense of the country's other religions. In ever greater numbers, those who were otherwise atheists or agnostics will come to accept Vedanta as a source of their mental, moral and spiritual well-being. Again, those who hold religious beliefs but still feel a void in their hearts will come to accept Vedanta as a philosophy that will bring them the peace and joy, by helping them to understand and practise their own religion better. Such has been the case with peoples of various nations of the world, and it is hoped the same will happen in Japan as well. □



Adversity

'Sisters, I bow down to the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha,' she began, but stopped for a moment. Her fight had been over long ago. Yet... 'Sisters, does one know from which path human beings come, and through which path they go? When someone comes to you thus, why address him as son or husband? Human beings come unasked, go away without being told. From where is all this coming and going—to be here for a few days? Why weep over this, sisters?' Though her face was calm her voice trembled. All knew that this sermon came from her heart. All knew her sad story. All looked at this great one intently, and absorbed her nectarine message through their ears.

Dense forest. 'You three sit here and relax. I shall fetch firewood. We shall prepare a delicious meal,' he said. She sat with her children. The younger one had fallen asleep. The older was busy imitating birds' chirping, and running to catch them. There was some uneasiness in her heart. It was years since she had visited her father's house. After all, what would be the reaction? Will her father scold and disown his dear daughter? Will his mother, who loved her only daughter so much, not forgive her? They would love to see her sons. Her parents were rich; they had no want. Yet, she felt uneasy about their unhappiness. She would convince them this time. And it was too late for them to scold her. That man might have been rich, but was a drunkard, a villain. Wealth had made her parents agree to give their daughter's hand to him. Had she married him, how unfortunate her life would have been! So she had gone away with this one—the incarnation of nobility.

'Aaahhh...! Aaahh...!' She was rudely

shaken from her thoughts. It was her husband's voice. She ran like one mad. 'What happened? What happened, my lord?' she shouted and ran. She blindly followed the voice's direction. And there he lay. 'What happened to you?' she cried and wept even as she tried to do something for him. 'Snake!... It was a black snake. It is all over now. I am so sorry I left you in this jungle in such a helpless condition...' His voice was getting weaker and weaker. He somehow managed to say, 'My dear wife, take...care...of the children...and yourself.' He was gone. She fainted. When she recovered, she knew not what to do. She wept aloud and struck her head against a tree. She ran to her children. 'My child, see what has happened! Just see how fate is testing this helpless mother of yours. Your father is dead, bitten by a snake.' Her son was four years old but understood 'snake'. He cried for fear. She took him and the sleeping one to her dead husband again. She managed to cover his body with clothes and leaves and thought she would bring help from her parents in Śrāvastī. She saluted her husband and took the young one in her arms and walked with the other. Things were left behind. They came to the river, now full. The water was waist-deep. Her suffering seemed endless. What would she do now? She looked around. Excepting for a huge vulture which looked at her menacingly from a distance, there was none.

She laid the younger child on the soft grass and carried the elder in her arms and waded through the river. It was quite wide, though appearing small. She hurried. On reaching the other bank she told her son, 'My child, wait here till I bring your brother.' She turned back. To her horror, she noticed that

the vulture had headed straight towards her sleeping child. She shouted, but the water drowned her voice. She tried to run, but fell. You cannot run in water with a strong current. She managed to get up and walked as fast as she could, waving her hands desperately. But then, fate had dealt its blow again. The vulture had scooped away her son. She cried aloud, shouted, threw her arms, but to no avail. Reaching the shore, she ran like one mad. She followed the vulture as fast as she could; but where is the comparison between a helpless woman, wet all over, and a flying bird? Meanwhile, seeing her waving her hands, her son on the other bank had entered the river. She cried hoarsely, 'Wait! Wait my child! Oh! Don't come! Wait!' He could not hear her amidst the roar of waves. The son perhaps thought she was calling him and unhesitatingly walked into the river. She wildly threw her arms, dissuading him from coming towards her. But all was over in moments. The strong current had taken its toll. Her son was washed away.

All in a day! Tragedy after tragedy had struck lethal blows. All her dear ones were gone, before her very eyes! She swooned, and woke up again. She was mad. She ran and ran. Thorns pierced her body. She did not care. But where would she go? The only hope was her parents. She would tell them about the whole tragedy. She would cremate her husband well. She would rescue her children's bodies. She crossed the river again and ran to Śrāvastī. She ran along the familiar streets towards her father's house. But she saw crowds! So many had gathered in the street. She pushed through everyone and tried to go near her house. People knew her, but as a shy, modest girl. Seeing her in such dress and behaviour, they did not stop her: they thought she knew. Eyes red, hair dishevelled, body wet and shivering, she asked, 'What happened?' A few told her at once: 'Yesterday night a fire broke out. It was a wooden house, and so got burnt soon; your par-

ents...er...couldn't be saved.' 'Dead?' she asked with surprising calmness. 'Yes,' replied an onlooker. 'Dead?' she asked again. She asked everyone, 'Dead?...Really dead?' and laughed. She laughed aloud. Someone said, 'Oh! She has gone m-a-d!' Neighbours wept seeing her condition. Slowly they came to know about her tragic story. They sent people to cremate her husband. She walked along the streets shouting, 'Snake took one, bird took one, river took one and fire took two!' Some tried to feed her, but she would not eat; she cried and laughed. She struck her head wherever possible. Days rolled by. None could console her. One day, she came to a grove and sat down there, weeping. A sermon was going on. The speaker stood up and walked towards her in slow, determined steps. 'But she is mad!' cried someone. He cared not.

'Paṭācārā! O Paṭācārā!' the gentle voice called. She looked up at those heavenly eyes. There was peace. She fell at his feet. Tears flowed down in torrents. The Buddha stood silently and said compassionately, 'Paṭācārā, I know it all. Now calm down.' As if by magic, she instantly calmed down and looked at herself. What an appearance! She felt shy and begged an onlooker for a cloth to cover herself fully. The Buddha said, 'You will wear ochre. Paṭācārā, you have suffered enough; you have seen enough of this evanescent world. Now, surrender to the Dhamma, the Sangha and the Buddha.'

How long she spoke, she did not know. How long they listened with rapt attention, the five hundred listeners did not know. Slowly she bowed down. She was calm. When it was over, Paṭācārā said, 'I have no pain now. Today, I am without tears. I am calm. For whom shall I weep, sisters? Unasked they came, unasked they went. For whom shall I weep, sisters?'

That was the great Therī Paṭācārā—one of the greatest luminaries amongst the Buddha's women disciples. □

Reviews and Notices

NARADA'S MAXIMS OF DEVOTION:
Translated and published by Sri N. Appaswamy, 5 NGR Buildings, Giripuram, Tirupati 517507. 1998. Pp. 12+iii. (Price not mentioned.)

The book under review is an English translation of the aphorisms of Narada. The aphorisms are 84 in number and provide the choicest ideas about devotion to the Lord. They refer to definitions of *bhakti* by Vyasa, Garga and Shandilya, and obviously, finding them to be inadequate, define devotion as offering all actions to God, discarding thoughts of pride and plod. This divine devotion is ever new. The aphorisms, further, mention that the love that the cowherd-damsels bore towards Krishna is devotion to the core.

Narada, along with Sanatkumara, is said to have maintained that devotion generates devotion. It is received by the favour and compassion of spiritual masters and God's grace. The path of devotion, it has been noted, is the easiest to tread. Devotion needs no proof. It is self-testifying. But it, nonetheless, needs some preparation. The doctrine of devotion should first be studied. The devotee should also observe non-violence, truth, purity, compassion, and faith in God. Thus the *sūtras* would subscribe to the 'monkey-theory' (*markaṭa-nyāya*) as against the 'cat-theory' (*mārjāra-nyāya*) as developed in later Vaishnavism.

The English translation of the *Bhakti Sūtras* has been done by a dedicated person. It is suggested that the next edition of the publication will include the original text as well.

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ON THE MEANING OF THE MAHĀBHĀRATA: By V.S. Sukthankar. Published by Motilal Banarsidass, 41-UA Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110007. 1998. Pp. xi+146. Rs.150.

The book under review comprises four lectures that the late Dr V.S. Sukthankar was engaged to deliver under the auspices of the University of Bombay in 1942. The fourth lecture was not delivered due to his sudden demise. The manuscripts

of these lectures were retrieved in 1953 and subsequently published by his devoted admirers.

On the Meaning of the Mahābhārata is an indispensable asset to the serious scholar of this great epic. Other treatises on the *Mahābhārata* have sought to idealize its thematic and dramatic structure. But V.S. Sukthankar, in his first lecture on 'The *Mahābhārata* and its Critics', provides a refreshing insight into the criticism it evoked in Western scholars. While Hermann Oldenberg considers it '...the most monstrous chaos...' (p. 1), Christian Lassen '...tried...to separate the various strata and to date them...a very hazardous venture at any time' (p. 5). Other critics discussed are Sorensen and E. Washburn Hopkins. Modern criticism of the *Mahābhārata* begins with the assumption that the epic is not the work of one poet, and is therefore a compilation, embodying the work of many writers of different abilities and different periods. From this point of view, the *Mahābhārata* consists of an 'epic nucleus' and 'an extensive and undigested mass of didactic episodic matter' (p. 10). Another critical approach, technically called 'Higher Criticism' or the 'Analytical Theory', would help one to dissociate the 'epic nucleus' from the 'interpolations'. But whatever might be the approach, the author states, the aesthetic value of the epic has not ceased to inspire countless Indians, who still revere it as a sacred text. Most critical theories formulated by Western scholars appear ill-conceived, specious, superficial, and sometimes ludicrous. It was only Joseph Dahlmann whose approach was nearest to the understanding of the great epic. Dahlmann insists that the *Mahābhārata* is '...primarily a synthesis, a synthesis of all the various aspects of the law...covered by the Indian conception of dharma, cast by a master intellect into the alluring shape of a story, of an epic...' (p. 20). The *Mahābhārata* is, therefore, an epic and a law book in one.

The other three lectures deal with the story of the *Mahābhārata* on the 'mundane plane', the 'ethical plane' and the 'metaphysical plane'. The author's contention is that the *Mahābhārata* embodies the spirit of 'Yogic Idealism'. His inflexible stance is that '...the chaos which modern critics think they see in the great epic of India is but a reflex of the state of their own mind, and not in the work at all....' (p. 124). The epic, instead, postulates '...a profound and universal philosophy, a glowing and rhythmic synthesis of life' (p. 124).

The book concludes with an Index. V.S. Sukthankar was an eminent orientalist. His critical interpretation of this great epic is original, incisive

and riveting. This analysis is bound to engender fresh interest in understanding the philosophy embodied in the *Mahābhārata*.

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THE MASTERPLAN PARADIGM FOR HUMAN SURVIVAL AND EXCELLENCE—THE SCIENCE OF LIFE: By Dr Sampooran Singh, Mrs Kanwaljit Kaur and Mr Paramjit Singh. Published by Faith Publishers, 586/10-D Chandigarh. 1998. Pp. xxiv+264. Rs.400.

This excellent book offers a scientific perception of the wholeness of life. The discoveries mentioned in the work have been made by a panel of scientists who explored the psycho-dynamics or transpersonal psychology of the conditioned mind-brain-body system. It perceives that the worlds of spirituality and the natural sciences are one. They relate to a single dynamic flow. The 'science of life' or 'humanist technology' relates to the intuitive perception of those truths that can liberate the mind from its own ideation or conditioning. The answer to conflict, both within and without, lies in a radical transformation of the human psyche. This transformation can happen only in the present, and these discoveries when understood can guarantee human survival. The unique feature of this book is that it offers an action plan for human survival and excellence. By fusing physics with philosophical thought, the authors have demonstrated the unity and wholeness of life.

The book has five sections. Each chapter is prefaced with an abstract which succinctly summarizes the main ideas of the chapter. The clarity of thought is revealed in the clarity of expression. The language, in spite of the occasional scientific terms, is lucid and simple. There are interesting sections like 'Exploring Parallels between States of Mind and Modern Physics', 'Global Terrorism and Violence', and 'A Scientific Vision on Ending of Corruption'. The book is interspersed with the invaluable comments and perceptions of Nobel laureates, scientists, psychologists, sociologists, politicians and philosophers on the validity and relevance of the need to perceive life as a whole. By exploring new dimensions of human consciousness, the authors state that a regenerated mind can heal 'the diseased (conditioned) mind-brain-body system.' Love, compassion and tolerance are the only virtues that can lead to a holistic

perception of life.

The book ends with an Appendix and an Index. This book is eminently readable, and more importantly, its timely injunctions serve as a reminder to those of us who have lost the art of living.

Dr Rama Nair

THE MOTHERHOOD OF GOD: By Swami Brahmeshananda. Published by Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai 600004. 1998. Pp. 135. Rs.20.

The holy trinity of the Ramakrishna Order, Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, have made their own special contribution to the worship of God as Mother. Taking a cue from Sri Ramakrishna's life-long conviction that his Mother was the Power that energized creation, the other two personalities formulated their own responses to the Motherhood of God; the Holy Mother became a living embodiment of the Master's conviction while Swamiji after an initial doubting and testing phase as Narendra accepted this inevitable of God as Mother. As an offshoot of this the Ramakrishna Movement today has brought about a novel spiritual revolution as far as women are concerned.

All these and many other aspects of the Motherhood of God find their place in the present volume by a senior, erudite monk of the Order, Swami Brahmeshanandaji, who is currently the editor of the Order's English journal, *Vedanta Kesari*. The volume is a collection of his essays written over a period of time and published in this and the other journal of the Order, *Prabuddha Bharata*, and also in *Samvit*, Sarada Math's English journal.

The volume has three individual essays on the attitudes of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda on the concept of the Motherhood of God and Mother worship. To Sri Ramakrishna the Divine Mother was manifest in the form of every woman he beheld and he went so far as to worship his own wife as the embodiment of the Mother. For Sri Sarada Devi the role of *sangha mata* was inevitable after the Master's passing away. Her effortless bearing of this mantle gave efficacy to the scriptural injunctions about the Motherhood of God. In spite of his natural attachment to Advaita Vedanta and the formlessness of Divinity, Swami Vivekananda had total dependence on the Mother of the Universe and retained his attitude of a helpless child of the Mother throughout life. The author describes all this in great detail.

These are followed by three essays on the Holy Mother's life and example, substantiating the

ideas of God as Mother which have gained currency in and through Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta. Finally, there is a chapter entitled 'The Three-in-One Ideal' which brings all these arguments to a fitting conclusion.

The pocket-sized volume is packed with interesting ideas and insights which make absorbing reading. The style is characterized by scientific precision and simplicity of exposition which does away with any kind of abstraction. The volume is also very well produced and is characteristic of the excellent standards of publication of the Ramakrishna Math, Chennai. The volume is eminently readable.

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**SWAMI VIVEKANANDA, PROPHET AND
PATHFINDER: By Swami Jitatmananda.
Published by Ramakrishna Ashrama, Dr
Yagnik Road, Rajkot 360001. 3rd edition,
1999. Pp. 344. Rs.50.**

Swami Vivekananda is one of the most inspiring personalities who have come onto the stage of Indian life in the recent past. His multifaceted genius continues to have a sizeable impact on people who are exposed to his life and message. As we move into the twenty-first century 'Vivekananda's message will help us enter [it] along with all the wonders of super-computer-technoscience, into super-industrial, spiritual, and holistic culture for the creation of a global civilization.' This is what the author of the book, Swami Jitatmananda, visualizes in his Preface to the volume.

Swami Jitatmanandaji is a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order. A very inspiring monk, he admits that his life has been and continues to be moulded by the constant living example of Swami Vivekananda. And this is obvious in the dynamism and zest which Jitatmanandaji brings to all that he undertakes.

And the present volume is no exception. Its first edition was published in 1984 when the author was at the Order's Hyderabad centre. It was even then a book worth reading. But in its present enlarged form it has improved beyond recognition and rivals some of the best books that have been written about Swamiji. The invigorating tone and energetic style make the reader feel the actual presence of Swamiji in each of the pages of the volume. The lucid and melodious English add to the pleasure of reading. The wide range of references to different disciplines of thought used by the author impart to the volume an encyclopedic dimension.

Though all the twenty chapters add their spe-

cial contribution to giving the book its present form, some of these need special mention. The second chapter on 'Ramakrishna: the Maker of Prophet Vivekananda' is very interestingly presented. Most of the facts are well-known to the admirers of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, but Jitatmanandaji has renewed them in his own inimitable way to make the master-disciple relationship come alive.

The chapter on 'Vedanta and Science' is as intricate as it is well-documented. It is an aspect close to the author's heart and its treatment brings to the fore his deep knowledge and involvement with the subject as well as his conviction that Swami Vivekananda was the undisputed pioneer in the reconciliation of these two branches of complementary knowledge.

About Swamiji's vision of the Advaita Ashrama in the Himalayas the author writes again with the backing of rich experience because he has himself spent long years in Mayavati as the editor of Swamiji's dream journal, *Prabuddha Bharata*. The love for the Himalayas which is manifest in each part of this chapter brings to mind what Vivekananda must have felt on the rare occasions he was afforded to visit the Himalayas. As he was conscious of Siva being ever-present in the long stretch of the snow-peaks we are conscious of Vivekananda's presence in this chapter.

About the regeneration of Mother Power, Jitatmanandaji writes with great sensitivity and presents a wide range of ideas from the Western women's lib to the Indian ideal of Sita and Savitri to the glorious life of Sri Sarada Devi. Vivekananda's dream of a self-sufficient, unshackled Indian woman finds fitting expression at the author's hands. The Sarada Math, being the culmination of Swamiji's dream, stands today as a realization of the highest ideal which he could have conceived.

Chapters on Vivekananda's impact on modern youth, his ideal of education, his role in formulating a practical Vedanta, his affinity with the masses, and others are excellent. They have a wealth of information which can serve as frameworks for individual transformation and social regeneration, both of which are essential if humanity is to survive in the present ecological climate. The book is enriched by an erudite and intuitive Foreword by the well-known Revered Swami Ranganathanandaji, President of the Ramakrishna Order. The printing, the cover-design and the overall production have been meticulously supervised which add to the volume's readability. It is hoped that the book which is priced so reasonably will receive the wide circulation which it deserves and have the kind of impact which the author visualizes.

Dr Sumita Roy

News and Reports

Ramakrishna Mission Rehabilitation Work

Andhra Pradesh Cyclone Rehabilitation

After pre-stressing the sixth and seventh concrete girders, steps are being taken to cast the last girder for the Vivekananda Bridge, under construction at Pallavaripalem village in East Godavari district. Besides, casting of one deck slab has been completed, while sub-base and base courses for the diversion of the existing asphalt road are continuing.

Gujarat Cyclone Rehabilitation

Under the 'Build Your Own House' scheme, Ramakrishna Mission, Porbandar, distributed 5500 Mangalore tiles among 20 cyclone-affected families for reconstruction of their houses at Srinagar and Kuchhodi villages in Porbandar district. The centre is also planning to take up construction work for the rehabilitation of families in Vadala village in the same district, whose houses were destroyed by the cyclone. The Government of Gujarat has earmarked a plot of land, measuring approximately 5 acres, for the purpose.

West Bengal Flood Rehabilitation

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur, is continuing its rehabilitation programme for the flood-affected people of Raninagar, Jalangi and 6 other villages in Murshidabad district. Out of the 676 houses to be constructed, 352 houses have already been completed while 47 are at various stages of completion. In addition, 200 low-cost latrines, out of the total of 1100 planned, have been set up, and 31 handpumps are to be installed soon.

News from Branch Centres

A student of the South School of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chennai, bagged the silver medal at the International Chemistry Olympiad held among 200 students from 53 countries in Bangkok.

The Vivekananda High School run by Ramakrishna Mission, Fiji, celebrated its golden jubilee from 29 to 31 July 1999. The function was inaugurated by the Prime Minister of Fiji, Mr Mahendra Pal Chaudhry, who is an alumnus of the school. Meetings organized on the occasion were addressed by Swami Samarananandaji, General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna

Mission, and Prof. I.S. Chauhan, High Commissioner of India to Fiji. The latter also inaugurated a sophisticated computer laboratory at the school. Cultural programmes and sports competitions also formed a part of the celebration, which was attended by a good number of dignitaries, friends, students and guardians. The institution is now renamed as Swami Vivekananda College.

Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, Calcutta, organized its foundation-day celebration on 24 July 1999, and the annual scientific conference of the Vivekananda Institute of Medical Sciences on 24 and 25 July. The conference, inaugurated by Justice Sri Shyamal Kumar Sen, Governor of West Bengal, was attended among others by the vice-chancellors of seven universities in the state.

Sri N. Chandrababu Naidu, Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, laid the foundation-stone for the Vivekananda Institute for Human Excellence at Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad, on 15 August 1999. Many distinguished persons and a large numbers of devotees and admirers attended the event. It is the aim of the proposed institute to train youths in moral, ethical and religious values.



The 14½-foot-tall bronze statue of Swami Vivekananda installed in Patna by the local Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama recently.